STUDIES IN HEBREW HISTORY

JUDITH F. SMITH

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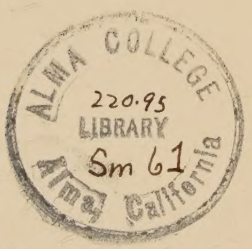
By
JUDITH F. SMITH
Author of "In Our Lady's Library," "Faith and Duty," "The Training of the Will," etc.



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FOREWORD

WE should like to recommend these pages very warmly indeed. Miss Judith Smith has the gift of presenting the familiar narratives of the Old Testament in a singularly attractive form. She has also the power to see and weld together the Divine and the human aspects of these undying stories. Such men as Jacob and David appeal to us as much by their weaknesses as by their heroism; we feel our kinship with them and at the same time marvel at the way in which God worked out the salvation of men who, to our human way of thinking, seem such unpromising material.

These sketches are no mere collections of platitudes; they are studies which must have demanded a great deal of thoughtful, prayerful, meditation. And, after all, this is the only way in which to approach the Bible which is emphatically not a book "wherein he who runs may read." One has to approach with faith, not in a sceptical frame of mind; like Moses the reader must take off his shoes "for this is holy ground."

Then, and only then, the very fact that so much of the story is replete with mystery comes almost as a relief ; we feel we are truly " on the heights " and must be content with the half-lights of which S. Paul sang so gloriously in the inimitable chapter on the faith of the Patriarchs.

F. Hugh Pope, O.P.

Hawkesyard Priory,
Rugeley, Stafford.
October 19th, 1927.

STUDIES IN HEBREW HISTORY

I

THE FOUNDING OF THE CHOSEN RACE

THERE are few things more fascinating than to be let into a secret, to be taken behind the scenes, to be admitted to the confidence of the great. The one who so honours us confers a signal mark of friendship.

"I will not now call you servants," said Our Blessed Lord to His apostles, "for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends: because all things whatsoever I have heard of My Father, I have made known to you."

Among the things of God which are made known to us is the Divine plan in the government of the world. History is like a length of tapestry. No design is apparent to us in that portion of which our own lives form a part. Unless we have faith in the Designer it may seem a mere jumble of isolated stitches, meaningless threads. But in history God has unrolled His work, as it were, and displayed a portion of the completed pattern, and in sacred history He actually shows

us His method of work, stitch by stitch. To study the Old Testament in this light is most interesting. We see the material at God's disposal, much the same then as now, and His arrangement of events with the help, or despite the hindrance, of man. We can put ourselves, also, in the place of these men, understand their emotions, note their response to or refusal of grace, and thus learn something of our own part in the pattern of life.

About 4,000 years ago two mighty empires, Egypt and Babylon, held sway. Both were ancient and highly civilized. Their respective histories already dated back for 2,000 years, and their arts and sciences were in many ways far in advance of ours to-day. Civilization and natural religion (those modern panaceas) had thus been given the fullest opportunity of elevating the human race. We can judge of their success for ourselves. There is only one undying thing in the world: truth, in its various manifestations. An individual or a nation inspired with a living, that is, a true, idea, invariably influences succeeding ages. Of these two mighty nations nothing remains to-day except relics in our museums; and it is only a dead thing which we keep upon a shelf.

God is Truth, and He wills that all men should

come to a knowledge of the truth. How should He compass His aim when civilization and the natural law had failed? He had "left not Himself without testimony," and there were individuals who worshipped the one, true God, but the religions of the nations were largely composed of gross nature worship which pandered to the lowest instincts of mankind, a worship, indeed, which is the logical outcome of the philosophy of the modern rationalist. God's problem, if we may so phrase it, was this: by what means could He teach Divine Truth to the world at large? The heavenly "wireless" would never be caught but by an occasional "listener-in" here and there. Even should such an one write down his message there was no means then of spreading the written word, and the Assyrian clay tablet or the Egyptian papyrus must remain unintelligible to most of the human race. Again, doctrinal writings are at the mercy of the individual interpreter.

There is only one incontrovertible record: history. If the history of a nation could show forth Divine Truth there would be a book which succeeding ages could read and understand, a "moving picture" for the instruction of mankind. How could such a nation be founded? Of necessity through an individual, one who could

be trusted to "command his children, and his household after him." He must possess great faith, courage, and endurance, and such a man was ready to God's hand. "And the Lord said to Abram: Go forth out of thy country and from thy kindred and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee . . . and in thee shall all kindred of the earth be blessed. So Abram went out as the Lord had commanded him." And thus it has come to pass that, whereas of the empires of Babylon and Egypt we have nought left but shells on the shore of time, the very civilization of the modern world is due to that simple pastoral chieftain of Ur of the Chaldees.

"Go forth," ran the Lord's command. Why so? It must have been a hard saying to Abraham. Surely he and his house could serve the Lord as well in Chaldea as in Canaan. Yes, but he could not found a nation there. The seedling tree must be given ample space to grow. Among Babylonian civilization, as the family grew into a clan it would lose its entity and be merged in the empire. But this family must become not only a clan but a nation, and a nation which should be in touch with present and future civilizations and yet separate from them, which should absorb their

culture and in return give them its own special gift. The little land of Canaan (see map) was peculiarly fitted to be the home of such a nation. It lay on the high road between the two great empires of that day, Egypt and Assyro-Babylon, and right in the path of the civilizations-to-be, Greece and Rome.

The Book of Genesis, from the twelfth chapter to the end, shows us the birth and early growth of the Hebrew nation, the Chosen Race. Abraham journeyed with his household into Canaan, to all appearance merely a nomad sheik seeking fresh pasturage for his flocks and herds, camping now here, now there, and arousing no opposition among the warlike Canaanites. The Divine promise, continually renewed, " All the land which thou seest, I will give to thee, and to thy seed after thee," was one which made great demands upon faith, for Canaan was no mere sparsely inhabited land, no easy prey, but a country of walled towns and highly civilized peoples. The Hittites in particular, among whom Abraham chiefly dwelt, were strong enough to treat with Egypt upon equal terms, and there were some half-dozen other nationalities to be taken into account as well.

Abraham had the natural qualities necessary for a leader of men. He inspired trust and

courage in others. Thus, when Lot was taken captive at the sack of Sodom he rescued him with his little band of 300 men from the armies of Chodorlahomor and his confederates. The military organization of Abraham's household is a striking proof of his power of leadership. But his faith was his pre-eminent and distinguishing quality, and therefore the trial of his faith, being "much more precious than gold," is continued to an amazing climax: the promise of a son to one "as good as dead," the birth of Isaac and subsequent command to sacrifice him; an act, of course, quite in accord with the religious ideas of the time, and one which Abraham so confidently expected to complete that St. Paul tells us that he virtually received his son from the dead. In his stupendous rôle of Father of the Faithful, Abraham displayed in his own life a pattern for his race. Absolute love and trust and obedience towards God was his rule of life. He set the standard for his nation.

The son of a great man is seldom very notable, and so it is not surprising to find Isaac merely a foil to his father, treasuring his memory, copying his example but taking no forward step himself. This attitude of his would serve to stamp the image of Abraham the more indelibly on the memory of his descendants. Isaac would picture

him as an heroic figure, one to fire the imagination of youth, whereas had he himself been a man of action his own deeds might have loomed the larger in his sons' eyes. But Isaac had the faults of his temperament. He could not " command his children," not though God Himself had given the parents explicit directions as to the up-bringing of those two difficult boys. In effect, the counsel given to Rebecca in Genesis xxv. 23 is this : " The two children are very different, they will go opposite ways from infancy. The younger is the stronger character and he should inherit the birthright." (From Jacob's testamentary dispositions we know that the birthright, with its several privileges, was at the father's disposal.) But Isaac was swayed by his weak affection for Esau, and so he laid on him a responsibility which he was quite unfit to bear, and by depriving Jacob of his due went far to make him a criminal.

Jacob had a strong character and could stand correction. It is noteworthy that Isaac was expressly forbidden to leave Canaan (Gen. xxiv. 6 ; xxvi. 2), possibly because he was incapable of the effort and initiative which a return would entail. Jacob, however, possessed great driving power. He was a man of strong affections. He cared deeply for his God, for his family, for the

high destiny of his race. Further, when he had learnt to govern himself he proved capable of governing others. God gave him a hard schooling. He knew that he was worth it. The deceit of his early years redounded upon his own head, time after time. Witness what happened with regard to his wives, his wages, the behaviour of his sons. But he learnt to love and trust the God of his fathers, and so the Supplanter became the Prevailer with God (Gen. xxxiii. 28).

The lessons of his exile thoroughly grasped, Jacob, at God's command, returned into Canaan, the head of a clan. Here was the nucleus of a nation, a man and his twelve sons, with their wives and children and many dependents. *But in Canaan they could not develop into a nation.* The family was held together by reverence for Jacob. On his death there would be no one who could control these hot-tempered, widely different men. They would intermarry with their heathen neighbours and settle among them. It was Abraham's problem over again. No tribe can develop into a nation when settled among a strong, pre-existent civilization. What was needed was a settlement under the protection of a friendly power. Egypt at this time offered the very place. A Semitic dynasty, the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings, now held the Egyptian throne.

Humanly speaking, there was no way by which an insignificant Hebrew tribe could come under the protection of the Pharaoh of Egypt, and Jacob was far from guessing the Divine plan when his sons reported the loss of his beloved Joseph. He probably saw only the punishment of his sins ; but punishment is seldom God's sole aim. Thus it came to pass that when Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt and sought to make provision for his relatives, neither their nationality nor their occupation was objectionable to the Pharaoh, though the native Egyptians held " all shepherds in abomination."

Thus the exact conditions necessary for the development of the tribe into a nation were fulfilled. The Hebrews had a rich country in which to live and multiply, they were protected by a powerful ruler and in no danger of being absorbed into the neighbouring civilization. Further, when the time should be ripe for their return, they were on the direct caravan route to Canaan.

II

THE MEANING OF THE EXODUS

TO-DAY, with all the nations of the world in a strange confusion, we turn with redoubled interest to study the methods of Him Who alone is ruler of the people, King of the kings of the earth.

The triumphant psalmody of the Church, hymning "When Israel went out of Egypt," has given us the inner meaning of that exodus, but also tends to make us forget the outward facts.[1] We are apt to think of the Israelites as longing to march to Canaan, held in leash by the obstinacy of Pharaoh, eager to go forward as soon as opportunity offered. But the fact is that the Israelites were no more anxious for the toil and conflict necessary to gain possession of the Promised Land than the natural man is nowadays for that warfare which must win him his eternal inheritance.

The Hebrews had been established in Goshen for several hundred years and had multiplied

[1] See the Book of Exodus (the whole), and the Book of Numbers. Chapters ix–xiv.

exceedingly. At the Exodus they numbered hundreds of thousands, if not millions, as some commentators think. These numbers, of course, include the " mixed multitude " which had become attached to them in one way or another. Now it is very hard to get a large body of men to move with one mind. It can only be done by rousing their emotions. Reasoning is useless with a crowd. Probably the most effective lever is that deep-seated instinct, self-preservation. We had instances of this in the Great War. Yet, in the designs of God, it was necessary that a whole nation should migrate. It must leave a fertile country, trek through a desert and win another land by force of arms. This people had become a nation that they might be an object lesson of Divine Government to the world at large, and to this end they must occupy Canaan, a land where they would be in touch with all civilizations. Goshen had provided sanctuary where the tribe could develop, under the wing of a Semitic Pharaoh. By what means could this prosperous people be moved to depart ?

To begin with, they had a national ideal. Joseph, their saviour, had told them when dying : " God will visit you after my death, and will make you go up out of this land, to the land which he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." But this

ideal alone would not have moved a nation to emigrate.

"Then, welcome each rebuff
"Which turns earth's smoothness rough,
"Each sting which bids nor sit nor stand but go!"

"There arose a new king over Egypt, that knew not Joseph." The Hyksos dynasty had been deposed by a native Egyptian line, and the Hebrew colonists, now grown very numerous, were looked on with suspicion. In the event of a fresh Semitic invasion they would constitute a grave peril. The new Pharaoh prudently set about converting a source of danger to a source of profit. He put the Hebrews to severe forced labour, on building and irrigation works. Their pleasant lives were ended. But still they multiplied. All through this story we see the Divine magic with startling clearness: man's actions serving God's ends. In nothing is this more apparent than in the final fierce decree whereby the Pharaoh sought to exterminate the hated Israelites. Every male child was to be slain at birth. But a young girl out-witted the law and laid her baby brother where the princess would find him. The royal lady adopted the child, and so this Hebrew boy was reared as an Egyptian prince and given the very best scientific and military

training of the age. Note the Divine purpose. The Hebrews could never leave Egypt without a competent leader, and in a life of slavery no man can be trained and developed for a position of power.

At forty years old Moses could rule others, but he could not govern himself, though his care for his oppressed brethren shows his noble character. He slew one of the Egyptian oppressors in anger and had to flee the country. Then for a further forty years he underwent a spiritual training. In the desert he learnt to know God. He was taught patience and endurance.

Moses was clearly appalled when he received the Divine command to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. His was a far harder task than that given to Abraham, but on the other hand he had had a very thorough preparation for it. He was to go to his people and proclaim his mission, the Divine origin of which he was to attest by miraculous signs. The people believed in him, but the Pharaoh demanded: "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?" Then followed the ten plagues.

Now the aim of the plagues was not merely, or even mainly, punishment. They were an object lesson of God's power and might, to make faith easy. The Israelites were, of course, the first

consideration, but they were for the Pharaoh's benefit also. We know that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart simply means that God withheld from him overwhelming grace to make him repent. But the plagues were a means whereby he might have come to a knowledge of the truth. For the plagues of Egypt were so many blows at the gods of Egypt. The Egyptians worshipped the productive forces of nature, and now one after the other their most sacred emblems were destroyed or turned to pests, the sacred Nile polluted, the sacred frogs and beetles[1] and cattle destroyed; their scrupulous personal cleanliness affected; their crops ruined; their sun god Ra eclipsed; and lastly (for Pharaoh was definitely unrepentant now) the death of the first-born, poetic justice for the murder of the Hebrew children.

The plagues had a three-fold purpose: to show the power and might of Jehovah, to eradicate belief in the gods of Egypt (a superstition which had probably affected the Israelites to some extent), and not only to make the Pharaoh anxious to get rid of the Hebrews, but to make the Hebrews themselves eager to go. One plague alone would not have had this result. It takes time for an idea to permeate a crowd. But at last

[1] It is thought that the fourth plague may have been a scourge of of beetles.

the Israelites were really ready for action, and then Moses clinched their determination by a symbolic service which specially emphasized the spiritual character of their deliverance : the Passover.

Peoples are welded into a nation by loyalty to a common ideal, just as a nation is divided into factions by diverse ideals. The unifying idea of the Israelites must be so strong that its effect could be seen in the very life of the nation. We note the care with which the Divine Teacher implanted this idea. The people knew that the Lord God had entered into a covenant with their ancestor, Abraham, and had promised His personal protection to the race. They were thus familiar with the thought of God's loving care, which is the first doctrinal truth to be easily grasped by a primitive race or the child mind. In the plagues they were shown the power of God. In the solemn institution of the Passover they were given a lesson on their duty towards God, which in its turn would ensure His continued care. Further, they now had a visible sign of God's presence : " The Lord went before them to show the way by day in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire."

Then came that dramatic proof of the protecting power of Jehovah, the overthrow of the pursuing Egyptians in the Red Sea.

The people marched forward on their way to the Promised Land, but not by the short coast route. They could not hope to conquer Canaan, which was occupied by strong, war-like peoples, until they themselves were properly organized and the temper of the mob tested. They must be taught to follow a leader; to endure hardship; above all, to have faith in God. So they were led southward to Sinai, where a secluded valley formed a natural sanctuary and gave shelter from hostile nomad tribes. It was a place of solemn grandeur, with Mount Sinai rising like a majestic altar at the farther end. On the way they had been shown the power of Jehovah exercised *for* them, instead of, as formerly, *against* their enemies; then, the Nile polluted, now at Mara the bitter waters made sweet; then, the cattle and the crops destroyed, now at Elim quails and manna sent; water from the rock at Rephidim; a battle with the Amalekites won by the power of prayer. Note that at these first murmurings there is no Divine reproof. God is giving them every opportunity of learning love and loyalty before He *commands* their allegiance.

Then, at Sinai, the Israelites are given a special and most awe-inspiring revelation of the might and majesty of God, and unmistakable proof of Moses' commission to act for God. But while

their leader is on the holy mount receiving from God Himself a tangible proof of the Divine realities, the Israelites are giving proof that they cannot rise to their high calling, that they are made of common clay. They beguile Aaron into making an animal representation of Jehovah, and worship it with licentious rites. They cannot yet be ruled by love. They have the minds of slaves. They must be ruled by fear. "And there were slain in that day about three and twenty thousand men."

But the Lord did not cast away His people. Their education continued. They should have a Tent of Meeting where they could worship God with duly prescribed sacrifices. So the tabernacle was built out of the offerings of the people, that all might feel that they had a share in it. And Moses gave the Israelites a complete and remarkable code of laws, dealing with every phase of life, a code which would enforce a high degree of civilization, and which embodied all that was best in the civilizations of Babylon and Egypt, but set forth now with Divine sanction and spiritual meaning.

The nation was at last equipped for conquest. It was organized into tribes, and the fighting men were under the command of an able young warrior, Josue, to whom Moses had probably

given special instruction on military tactics from his own store of experience. The pillar of cloud signalled departure and the people set forth towards Canaan. Neither murmuring nor insubordination could be tolerated now, and the instances which occurred met with summary punishment. It was needful to inspire the people with a great desire to overcome all obstacles and conquer Canaan in one sweep, so Moses sent out spies, one from each tribe, with special instructions to " bring of the fruits of the land " which would look very tempting to desert-weary eyes. But all but two of the spies brought a discouraging report: the walled cities were too strong to take, the inhabitants too powerful to be overcome, and the stirring words of the two courageous spies were powerless to rouse the slave-soul of the people. With sullen mutterings they planned to elect a rebel leader and return to Egypt. Nothing could be done with persons of this type. Therefore the Lord declared that none of those now adult should enter Canaan, they should dwell in the desert for forty years, till another generation should be grown up, for a nation which defies all other methods of education can be moulded through the minds of its children.

III

THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

THE ordinary method of Divine Providence is to use natural means to a supernatural end.—This is what we should expect when we consider that the laws of nature are themselves God's laws.

The Israelites had dwelt for forty years in the desert, within striking-distance of Canaan their promised land. This time of waiting, decreed as a national punishment and as a purification, was meant to be the nation's salvation. The generation which left Egypt was a race of slaves, and not even their miraculous deliverance could fill these people with that faith in the might of Jehovah which would have made them conquerors. A new generation must be reared to take and hold their inheritance.

The desert, so near and yet so far from Canaan, was the best possible nursery for the future conquerors of that land. The children would grow up with the thought of that bounteous country ever before them as the lode-star of their dreams.

Josue and Caleb would know well how to take advantage of the ambitions of youth. By vivid stories they would fire their young hearts with the desire of possession, and no doubt Josue would drill the youths in the arts of war. Further, the young people would not be allowed to miss a lesson of terrible significance when, in the course of time, they found themselves bereft of the elder generation. How awful in His power and might was their God, Jehovah, whose commands must be obeyed, and who did not scruple to punish even His great servant, Moses. We can easily understand how the conquest of Canaan was prepared for during those forty years of desert life.

An army can effect little without an able leader, but in Josue the Israelites had a commander peculiarly fitted for his task. He had been Moses' personal friend and close attendant. He was a witness of the wonders and glories of Sinai; doubtless he learnt political economy and military tactics from the very lips of his great chief. Doubtless, too, he felt for him a devoted loyalty. We can imagine how eagerly Josue looked forward to leading the Israelites to the conquest of Canaan. It was the direct command of Jehovah, a sacred duty, also, in that it completed the work of Moses, and the desire of his own heart since

he had first spied out the land and seen that it would fall, like a ripe fruit, to a strong hand. At last! After all these years!

Merely natural reasons, however, were never to be the animating principles of this strange race, whose history must form a tangible proof of God's government of the world. Josue made no movement until he received his marching orders: "Arise, and pass over Jordan, thou and thy people with thee, into the land which I will give to the children of Israel. . . Behold, I command thee, take courage and be strong." But Josue knew well that God only helps those who help themselves, and that he was not expected to fold his hands and wait for a miracle. He sent spies to view the land and they brought back an encouraging report. Then he struck camp and marched to the Jordan valley, where beyond the river the city of Jericho guarded the passes into the interior. At this season of the year, harvest time, the Jordan, swollen with the spring rains, was in flood, and impassable for a great host. But "man's extremity is God's opportunity." Josue sent heralds throughout the camp telling the people to arise and follow when the Ark should lead. Then he ordered devout preparation for the wonders of the morrow. The entry into the promised land was to be by the visible power of

Almighty God. Next day, in obedience to the divine command, priests bearing the Ark entered the flooded river and immediately the current was dammed and the Israelites passed over the waterless channel.

Josue pitched his camp at Galgal and there admitted into the covenant these young soldiers of the Lord, by the rite of circumcision, which had been in abeyance since their fathers had fallen away. It was a significant spot to choose for this national renewal. It is thought that the word Galgal means a circle, such as our druidic circle at Stonehenge. Remains of these temples of nature worship are found to this day in the ruins of Canaanitish cities, and if, as seems probable, there was such a temple at Galgal, it was peculiarly significant that here the Chosen Race should renew their covenant with Jehovah, pledging themselves to purity of life, and consequently to the overthrow of this degrading worship. Here, also, they kept the passover, and here, as they had now entered Canaan and partaken of its corn, the manna ceased.

The conquest of Canaan lays stress on the fact that God and man, working together, are irresistible. As a rule, God will not work without man, and man cannot work without God. Josue, reconnoitring in the vicinity of Jericho,

met " the prince of the host of the Lord " and was given a plan of campaign. The taking of Jericho was designed to emphasize the Israelites' dependence upon their Heavenly Commander, but good military strategy was employed nevertheless, and that silent compassing of the city, day by day, was exactly calculated to undermine the *morale* of its inhabitants. Incidentally, it also showed the working of the ideal state in which the ecclesiastical, the military, and the civil powers all work together for the common weal. Then came the dramatic climax, and here, as in the crossing of the Jordan, natural causes may have been God's instruments : a landslide and an earthquake.

The wholesale destruction of human life ordered in these wars presents a difficulty, which is not lessened by the reflection that the whole history of the world abounds in instances of sweeping destruction, caused variously by war, pestilence, famine, the forces of nature. In this connection some words of the saintly Visitandine, Sister Benigna Consolata Ferrero, are illuminating. During the World War she " was urged several times by her Superiors to obtain the cessation of the terrible scourge. Jesus responded to her ardent and repeated supplications by words full of consolation. It was not a chastisement of

His Justice upon the world, otherwise its sins would already have caused its destruction ; it was a chastisement sent by His Mercy to save a multitude of souls running to their eternal ruin. . . . As to those who remain obstinate, it was mercy also to shorten their lives here below that their torments might be less dreadful in eternity." In the case of the ancient Canaanites, of course, we know that their destruction was necessary in the cause of moral sanitation.

After the fall of Jericho the pass into the hill country lay open, and Josue marched on Hai, an Amorrhite stronghold, thinking to take it with a small force. To his dismay, his men were utterly routed. Josue was too good a general not to realize the full force of this disaster, both in loss of prestige and loss of confidence. He prayed to the Lord in great distress of mind, and was told that the defeat was due to one among them who had sinned by taking of the spoils of Jericho against explicit orders. They must find the culprit by casting lots, tribe by tribe, family by family, and man by man. By this means Achan was taken and, adjured by Josue, confessed his sin. Then follows a remarkable lesson on the solidarity of the human family in general and of the Israelite nation in particular. Through the sin of one, evil had befallen all, therefore justice required that the

sinner must die. Moreover, as his sin was against the nation the nation must be his executioner: "All Israel stoned him." Apparently his household suffered with him. They were, of course, partners of his guilt.

At the command of Jehovah Josue then took Hai, but though assured: "I have delivered into thy hand the king thereof, and the people, and the city," he did not fail to employ skilful tactics. Thus this defeat and the succeeding victory were a very striking object lesson that Israel conquered solely by the might of the Lord of Hosts.

The destruction of Jericho and Hai filled the inhabitants of southern Canaan with fear, and the Gabeonites, by a cunning stratagem, obtained an alliance with the invaders. This alarmed and angered the King of Jerusalem, and with four other petty chiefs he attacked the Gabeonites on the ground that they had gone over to the common foe. They sent to Josue for help, and he felt bound in honour to go to the rescue of his unwanted allies. The result was a crushing defeat for the five Canaanite kings. The very elements fought for Israel. A terrible hailstorm struck the fleeing hosts, so that "many more were killed with the hailstones than were slain by the swords of the children of Israel." Further, with glorious daring, Josue asked of the Lord that He

would enlist the help of the heavenly bodies on their behalf: *Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon: and the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies.* The exact nature of the remarkable phenomenon which took place at Josue's prayer, cannot be determined, but whatever its precise form, it must have made a great impression upon the Canaanites, to whom the sun and moon represented powerful deities.

Meanwhile, the kings of northern Canaan united in force and mustered near the waters of Merom. But Josue attacked suddenly, took them by surprise and utterly routed their armies, burning their formidable war-chariots and destroying their cities. Finally, "the land rested from wars." All the Canaanite tribes were not exterminated, but the Israelites had established themselves strongly in the land and had made themselves respected and feared. Then Josue divided the conquered territory by lot among the tribes, and the Tabernacle was set up in Silo.

Josue thus attained his heart's desire. He had lived to see Israel settled in the promised land, and at peace. When at length he knew that his time had come to go "the way of all the earth," he summoned the elders of the people to receive his final counsels. His was a soldier's forethought

which guards against future dangers. He pointed out that it was God who had given them the land, "from the east of Jordan unto the great sea," but there was still much for them to do for "many nations yet remain." In the immediate future theirs would be a life of warfare, necessitating vigilance, but they knew the secret of victory: if they kept the commandments of Jehovah He would fight for them. Above all, they must have nothing to do with the local idolatry. Then he summarized the signal favours which the Lord God had shown to their race, and in stirring words urged them to vow unswerving allegiance to Him. The people responded to his appeal, and a great stone was set up "in the sanctuary of the Lord," as a memorial of the renewal of the covenant between Jehovah and His people.

IV

THE AGE OF THE JUDGES

THE period covered by the age of the Judges is one of paramount importance in the history of the Hebrews. Israel was merely a collection of tribes when she followed Josue to the conquest of Canaan; the experiences of the following three or four hundred years welded those tribes into a nation.

As we have seen, the history of the Chosen Race is a picture set before the world for all time, illustrating God's methods with His people, and this part of their history brings out the principles of Divine government very clearly and concisely. When Israel sinned she suffered adversity, when she repented and cried unto the Lord He had mercy on her. We catch glimpses, too, of the ideal state, a theocratic or God-guided democracy. A ruler is chosen for his outstanding moral qualities. He governs by obedience to and reliance upon the Divine will. Peace, justice, and equity is his aim.

To understand the conditions under which

Israel developed it is necessary to note her geographical and political position. The conquest of Canaan was far from complete on the death of Josue. The Israelites had obtained little more than a firm foothold in the land. They held the central mountain range west of the Jordan, but the plain of Esdraelon cut into it like a wedge, and here (as well as elsewhere up and down the country) the Canaanites were strongly entrenched in walled towns, and were formidable in battle by reason of their scythe-wheeled chariots. To the west, in the lowlands, between the mountains and the sea, were the fierce and war-like Philistines. The Jordan valley was too tropical to contain many inhabitants, but the fertile uplands beyond it to the east, though assigned to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasses, were still largely in the power of Ammon and Moab. Still further eastward, on the borders of the desert, were the wild nomad tribes of the Madianites and Amalekites, which from time to time regularly raided the interior. Far across this eastern desert were the great kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon. Syria and the empire of the Hittites lay on the north, while beyond the southern desert was Egypt. Israel was thus surrounded by foes, strong enough to crush her, numerous enough to tear her limb from limb, or, should

peaceful interpenetration be her policy, sufficiently cultured and established to absorb the scattered tribes into the surrounding civilizations. It was the problem of the patriarchs over again: by what means could this people be preserved as a separate nation, neither assimilated nor annihilated by their neighbours.

When we consider the material out of which the nation of Israel is to be formed it looks most unpromising. The appendix to the book of the Judges, chapters xvii.–xxi., gives us an appalling picture of the lawlessness and savagery of the times. Throughout the book, also, we can see that there was at first no sense of national unity among the different tribes. Each was purely individualistic, playing for his own hand, caring little for any interest other than his own. The elements of the Hebrew character are likewise vividly portrayed, its independence, power of assimilation, courage, and resolution, together with its tendencies to meanness and cowardice.

The influence of their new surroundings is another factor in the situation. The Israelites had been leading the life of desert nomads, held together only by a strong leader. With the death of Josue they split off into tribal parties. Settled in an agricultural country, they now became farmers, and had perforce to seek instruction

in husbandry from their neighbours. Thus they fell under the influence of the local nature worship, to which, they would be told, the fertility of the soil was due. Hence the worship of the local Baalim became intermixed with the worship of Jehovah. Here lay the real national danger, for the destiny of this people was to develop into a nation which, flower and fruit, should last throughout the ages. Its unifying idea, therefore, must be an eternal verity, the worship of the true God.

To use a homely but hallowed simile: as a brood of chickens will stray far from the hen, cheeping, pecking, pursuing this or that, but at the approach of danger will flee to her sheltering wings, so the Israelites would continually stray from their allegiance to Jehovah, but in time of peril would again call upon Him and find safety. The whole series of oppressions and deliverances is calculated to emphasize their dependence upon their God. When they turned from Him it invariably spelt disaster, when they renewed their allegiance and acknowledged their dependence it meant peace and prosperity. The very nature of the most striking deliverances lays stress on their Divine origin.

The first oppression, by Chusanrishathaim (" Ethiopian of double iniquity ") lasted for eight

years, then the people were delivered by Othoniel and had rest for forty years. Eglon, king of Moab, laid the eastern tribes under tribute for eighteen years, when Aod freed them from the tyrant by an act of remarkable daring. He headed a deputation bringing tributary offerings. They presented their gifts and departed, but Aod turned back, saying that he had a secret message for the king, whereupon Eglon granted him a private audience. This was the moment for which Aod had prepared. On his right thigh a dagger was concealed, where it would not be suspected by the guards, for Aod was left-handed. The word used means literally "lamed in his right hand," and if the hand were indeed visibly useless this would facilitate his plan, and would be a fine example of an infirmity turned to good account by sheer pluck. Be that as it may, Aod, alone with the oppressor of his people, said solemnly: "I have a word of God to thee, O King," and quick as lightning plunged with his dagger before that obese potentate could defend himself. Then he locked the doors on the corpse and made good his escape. And the land had rest eighty years.

Trouble with the Philistines in the west was temporarily allayed by Samgar, but a powerful confederation of Canaanitish chiefs, under Jabin,

oppressed the north for twenty years. Deborah, who then judged Israel, summoned Barac to her aid and inspired the people with courage to attack these formidable foes. Barac inflicted a crushing defeat and the land had rest for forty years. Then those desert robbers, the Madianites, became very troublesome in the east. For seven years they harried Israel so that the people had to leave their unwalled villages and take refuge in mountain caves. Their crops were destroyed and their cattle carried off. This meant starvation for an agricultural people. In their distress they cried unto the Lord and He sent a prophet who told them plainly that their troubles were due to their infidelity to Him who had given them the land.

The Madianites were encamped in their thousands in the valley of Jezreel, and one of the local farmers, Gedeon by name, was threshing his scanty harvest in his wine-press, lest the robbers should espy him if he used the usual threshing-floor on the hill side. Suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared before him with strange and heartening words: "The Lord is with thee, O most valiant of men." Gedeon, depressed with his own and his neighbours' troubles, replied, "If the Lord be with us, why have these evils fallen upon us? Where are His miracles which

our fathers have told us of?" The answer to Gedeon's plaint is God's usual reply to men: "Go in this thy strength, and *thou* shalt deliver Israel. Know that I have sent thee," *i.e.*, "Up and act and I will help you." Gedeon, whose character is most skilfully portrayed in the sacred narrative, obeyed the divine command. And the land had rest forty years.

But the people again transgressed the commandments of God, and the Ammonites oppressed them for eighteen years. At last, rendered desperate, they sent for help to Jephte, an outlaw, but renowned for his skill in warfare. Jephte agreed to come on condition that he should be reinstated in his tribe. He tried negotiations with the enemy, but they proved fruitless. Then "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephte" and he summoned his countrymen to battle and inflicted a great defeat on their oppressors. He was the kind of man to make a success of any undertaking, simply by throwing himself whole-heartedly into it. Thus, outlawed, he made a name as a robber chief. Called to his country's aid, he shrewdly bargained. (He seems to have suspected that "a land fit for heroes to live in" might not necessarily fall to the hero's share.) Then, with the responsibility of the campaign upon him, he neglected nothing to ensure

victory, and so made that vow which resulted in the sacrifice of his domestic happiness, both the vow and its consequences being fully in accordance with the conscience of the times.

Then came trouble with the powerful Philistines and a champion specially trained and educated in the person of Samson, who was dedicated to Jehovah as a Nazirite, from birth. The Nazirites were ascetics whose lives were a standing rebuke to those of their countrymen who adopted the sensual customs of the Canaanites. As we know, obedience is what God values, not the greater or lesser importance of the act which exercises it. Samson seems only to have been required to keep his hair unshorn, the outward mark of his dedication. It is very striking that those unlikely labourers, called in mid-life to the vine-yard (the lame-handed man, the woman, the simple husbandman, the outlaw) should have been splendidly successful, but that the one set apart and endowed with every gift of soul and body should fail. That very failure, however, taught a significant lesson : disobedience meant the loss of the Spirit of the Lord. But the wrecked life ended in triumph. Samson's growing locks had not out-stripped his growing penitence, his renewed dependence upon his God.

" . . . Samson hath quit himself
" Like Samson, and heroically hath finished
" A life heroic, on his enemies
" Fully revenged; hath left them years of mourning,

. . . . . .

" And, which is best and happiest yet, all this
" With God not parted from him, as was feared,
" But favouring and assisting to the end."

V

THE HEBREW MONARCHY

IT is a significant fact that the first two Books of Kings should be also called, as an alternative title, the Books of Samuel. The last and greatest of the Judges, he who most obviously governed in the name of Jehovah, established the monarchy after the pattern shown him by God, that the Chosen Race might have a theocratic (or God-given) kingship in succession to a theocratic democracy.

The time had come when a monarchy was necessary, both for social and spiritual purposes. The people were now a nation, and as such needed a political and military head, and the unifying force which devotion to a reigning house would bring. Further, this material kingdom was to be the bud from which a spiritual kingdom, the Kingdom of Christ, should blossom.

Samuel himself is a majestic figure, awful in his loneliness. He was born in answer to the prayers of a devout woman, and dedicated to God from infancy. He grew up in the hardest school of all, among inferior superiors. His

guardian was the weak Heli, his examples Heli's degenerate sons. When about twelve years old, just the age when a boy is ripe for hero-worship, Samuel was commissioned to inform Heli of the Divine punishment in store for him and his family. The blow fell; thenceforward Samuel bore alone the weight of the sins and sorrows of his countrymen. He had no spiritual equal, no human mind to lean upon, his sole adviser and helper was the Lord his God.

The Philistines oppressed the land for many years, and the Hebrews were reduced to ignominious vassalage. Samuel grew old and his sons proved to be worthless persons. A deputation from the people approached Samuel and said: "Make us a king, to judge us, as all nations have." This request was a severe blow to the old prophet. Was not Israel a theocracy, governed by God Himself? Was all his teaching, then, in vain? For the dagger point of their demand was *a king as all nations have*, but Israel was not to be as other nations. The prophet told the people plainly what their request entailed. He drew a vivid picture of the despotism of an oriental monarch, but they persisted in their demand for a king to lead them in battle. "And the Lord said to Samuel, Hearken to their voice and make them a king."

With the establishment of the monarchy, from which his sensitive loyalty to Jehovah had at first shrunk, there came a great joy into Samuel's lonely life. Saul was evidently the darling of his old age. And the new king had every chance to make good which can fall to the lot of man: a vocation from God with its consequent grace, a counsellor *par excellence* in spiritual matters as well as in statecraft, the passionate loyalty of his people, great personal advantages; yet he lacked the one thing needful. As the existence of this nation was dependent upon their loyalty and obedience to Jehovah, so their king must be the embodiment of these principles. But Saul lacked this delicate loyalty, this fine obedience. He took his own way. The matters in which he disobeyed were slight in themselves (an impatience to sacrifice, a question of spoils of war), but when we remember that the fate of mankind turned upon an apple, his rejection on these grounds need not surprise us. Indeed, a matter slight in itself is just what we might expect, for the essence of obedience lies in the will to obey in minute details.

Thus came the crowning tragedy of a grand but tragic life, for Samuel was called upon to tell the man he loved: "The Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel."

It is clear that Samuel could see no reason why

the insignificant shepherd lad he was next commissioned to anoint should be a man after God's own heart. Yet that trust in God which made David the ideal Hebrew king soon became apparent. A Philistine force was invading Juda, and their champion, Goliath of Gath, marched daily up and down between the opposing armies, challenging a Hebrew warrior to mortal combat. No one could be found who would face the mighty Philistine. Then David coming up from the sheepfolds to bring a present to his soldier brothers, heard and accepted the challenge.

A chequered career, full of strongly marked light and shade, but served to emphasize David's special qualities of loyalty to and confidence in his God. His very vices might almost be said to brighten his virtues. In nothing is his contrast to Saul more remarkable than in the social side of their characters. Saul was what we should nowadays call "very respectable." David most certainly was not. Saul kept every one of the ten commandments, David broke at least four at one stroke. But when both received the Divine reproof, through the mouth of a prophet, whereas Saul protested that he was "forced by necessity" and that he "had fulfilled" and "had hearkened," David answered simply, "I have sinned." Hence he and not his predecessor

merited the reply, "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin." Saul kept the letter of the law but was a stranger to its spirit; David broke the letter but loved the Lord his God with all his heart and his neighbour as himself.

Though David's life so finely fulfilled its purpose, he being a king who represented in his own person the ideals of his nation, yet he was not able to accomplish what he himself felt to be a suitable consummation of his life-work. The wish of his heart was to build a beautiful place of worship to the God of his fathers, but the Lord reminded him that his hands were stained with bloodshed and told him that this work was for his son, who should be a man of peace. For David the toilsome preparation, war that peace might ensue, material wealth garnered that all might go forward without let or hindrance; for Solomon the glory of accomplishment.

The first years of Solomon's reign were filled with every circumstance which could possibly contribute to success, whether material or spiritual. He reigned over a united people, he was at peace with the surrounding nations, and had formed alliances with his powerful neighbours, Egypt and Phœnicia. A flourishing caravan trade and a large navy brought great commercial prosperity to the country. In the short space of seventy-five years

the Hebrew court had developed from the homestead of a simple yeoman, such as it was in Saul's early days, to the oriental magnificence of Solomon's time. On the other hand, the young king had been endowed with the incomparable gift of wisdom, so that the fame of his wisdom exceeded even the fame of his wealth.

This possessor of "a wise and understanding heart" began his reign gloriously and meetly by building a magnificent temple to Jehovah. But riches increased and he set his heart upon them. He built not only a temple but a palace, a harem and a fortress. Soon his own splendour, rather than the glory of God and his people's welfare, dominated his actions. He ruined the work of his father David. As a monarch he embodied the opposite of his father's ideals. He led his people back to the degrading nature worship from which generations of strenuous effort had just succeeded in delivering them, and his deplorable example gained weight from the glory which gilded his name. His grinding systems of forced labour and heavy taxation alienated the people from his dynasty. Disaffection began even before his death, and Moab and Syria dared to raise their heads in defiance. What sort of training for future responsibility would the heir to the throne find in that dissolute court? It was apparent as

soon as he became king. A deputation seeking a measure of just reforms was met with insult, with the result that ten of the tribes revolted from the house of David, lost the ideal of a theocratic monarchy, lost the unity of the faith, and finally lost their identity when captivity swept them from their land.

Juda and a portion of Benjamin alone remained to David's seed. They were held together by loyalty to Jehovah through the worship of the Temple at Jerusalem, and loyalty to David. In fulfilment of the divine promise this unity was strong enough to withstand the shock of captivity, which served to purify the people and weld them more firmly into a nation waiting for the King who was to come.

VI

THE DIVINE LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT

THE key of the tragedy to King David's fall and punishment may perhaps be found in a curious little sentence in 2 Kings xi. 1 : " And it came to pass at the return of the year, at the time when Kings go forth to war, that David sent Joab and his servants with him . . . and they ravaged the country of the children of Ammon . . . but David remained in Jerusalem."

Here surely, is a finger pointing to deterioration of character : " At the time when kings go forth to war. . . David remained in Jerusalem." He had been raised to the throne of Israel that he might lead the Lord's people to victory over their enemies, just as Saul had been rejected because he preferred compromise. These wars, of course, were necessary for moral sanitation, but doubtless there was a deeper meaning yet, doubtless they were symbolical of Israel's destiny as a nation which must fight the battles of the Lord.

Why then did David shirk his duty at this

season when campaigns were usually renewed? His type of temperament, full of what we call "charm" which is due to strong emotions, always feels the pull of the primitive instincts, whence come both its strength and its weakness. These instincts can function either upwards or downwards, in love of God and service of man, or for mere self-indulgence; and this fatal spring-time David relaxed his hold upon himself, let Joab set out without him and gave himself up to ease and idleness. Taking his noon-day siesta on the flat roof of his palace, he presently noticed a very beautiful woman on the roof of a neighbouring house. He sent to inquire who she was, and was told that she was Bethsabee, the wife of one of his most trusty officers, Urias the Hethite. His previous self-indulgence had unfitted David to meet the onrush of a strong passion, and his principles were swept away like straws upon a flood. He wanted Bethsabee and he took her, and then covered his sin by deeds of cold-blooded cunning, culminating in the murder of Urias by means of an order to Joab to place him "where the fight is hottest." "And this thing which David had done was displeasing to the Lord." In downright wickedness David had now surpassed anything which Saul had ever done, and we hold our breaths at the expected stroke which

shall sweep this hope of Israel from his throne. Everything depends upon the spirit in which he will take his punishment.

One day Nathan the Prophet entered the royal presence and, as one seeking justice, narrated a story. There was a certain poor man whose sole treasure was his one ewe lamb. Close by dwelt a rich man who owned flocks and herds, but when a stranger came seeking hospitality he spared his own sheep and oxen and seized the poor man's lamb for his feast. David expressed great indignation at such an act, and ordered condign punishment, whereupon the prophet turned upon him saying: " Thou art the man ! " and set forth his sins in unsparing detail, announcing God's wrath and the punishment which would ensue. " And David said to Nathan : I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David : The Lord also hath taken away thy sin." David was forgiven, for he had truly repented, but it did not follow that he should go unpunished. On the contrary, just because his position intensified his guilt, so his disgrace should be open, in the sight of all men. The immediate punishment was the death of Bethsabee's child. David received this sorrow humbly and manfully.

And now other consequences of the king's moral weakness began to show themselves.

David's lack of self-control inevitably reacted upon the hot-blooded young men, his sons, to whom, moreover, he was weakly indulgent. Amnon, the eldest, encouraged rather than deterred by his father's example, did a grievous wrong to Absalom's family, which the latter was determined to avenge, the more so as David refused to punish Amnon, "for he loved him because he was his first-born." Such an attitude can breed nothing but strife. Absalom bided his time, and then at a sheep-shearing festival persuaded David to allow all his half-brothers to come to a feast in his house; whereupon he murdered Amnon and then took refuge with his grandfather, the king of Gessur, a small principality on the western border of Bashan. There he remained for three years. We can see that this was a time of bitter grief to David. He mourned for the dead and his heart hungered for the absent, but he would not recall him. Joab could not bear to see David fretting his heart out, and he managed to obtain his consent to Absalom's return, but it was another two years before the king would receive and forgive him.

A fierce sense of injustice developed and still rankled in Absalom's mind, first in regard to the shielding of Amnon, and then in his father's treatment of himself. He was neither condemned

nor forgiven, neither assigned suitable status as a prince nor punished as a criminal. The tardy forgiveness of his father had no effect upon his course of action; he felt contempt for him, not love or even respect. He saw that he might scheme with impunity, David would do nothing. Absalom possessed to the full his father's charm and great personal beauty. They were his chief assets, and he determined to use them for all they were worth. He "made himself chariots, and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him," a sure way of winning the attention of the populace. He next set himself deliberately to curry favour with the people, going early to the city gate, where causes were heard, and talking to all about their grievances, implying that the king was slack in administering justice, but if *he* were king things would be very different. He even went so far as to encourage extreme familiarity in his intercourse with the people. "And he enticed the hearts of the men of Israel."

Meanwhile sundry discontents were fermenting among the people, of which Absalom took full advantage. The Benjamites bitterly resented David's elevation to the throne of Saul, and the men of Juda seem to have felt it a grievance that David had made Jerusalem the capital instead of the ancient and sacred city of Hebron. Building

upon this, Absalom, under pretext of a vow, asked leave to go to Hebron, and there raised the standard of revolt. Achitophel, David's most trusted counsellor, joined him, and the rebellion assumed formidable proportions. Absalom alone was probably incapable of much harm, but his personal charm united to Achitophel's wisdom made a deadly combination. "There was a strong conspiracy, and the people running together increased with Absalom. And there came a messenger to David: All Israel with their whole heart followeth Absalom."

David's first thought was for his people. In order to avoid a siege of Jerusalem he quietly withdrew from the city followed only by a few trusty adherents, chief among whom were Joab and the warrior, Ethai of Gath, with his six hundred men, who flatly refused to leave the king. Sadoc and Abiathar, the priests, would fain have accompanied him, with the ark, but David refused to allow this. "Carry back the ark of God into the city," he said. "If I shall find grace in the sight of the Lord, he will bring me again. . . . But if he shall say to me 'Thou pleasest me not,' I am ready; let him do that which is good before him." Meanwhile, he added, he would lie hid in the wilderness and they could best serve his interests by remaining in Jerusalem, whence they

could send him word about the course of events. So the priests returned to the city. "But David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, going up and weeping, walking barefoot, and with his head covered, and all the people that were with him went up with their heads covered weeping." This royal penitent made his disgrace an occasion of public penance.

David knew where his chief danger lay and he prayed, " O Lord I beseech thee, turn the counsel of Achitophel into foolishness." When he had ascended his way of sorrows and " was about to adore the Lord " on the top of the hill, whence he had a full view of the city of his glory and his shame, there came to him the only person who could save him if this was to be a battle of wits, Chusai, the one man he knew who was a match for Achitophel. Chusai was eager to accompany his king, but David begged him to return to Jerusalem as his Secret Service agent, to " defeat the counsel of Achitophel." So they arranged a system of communications and each went his way.

Meanwhile Absalom, accompanied by Achitophel, entered Jerusalem in state. To him came Chusai and tendered respectful greeting : " God save thee, O king." Absalom asked why he had not followed David, his friend, and Chusai answered : " I will be his whom the Lord hath chosen, and all this people . . . as I have served

thy father, so will I serve thee also." He quickly realized that he had arrived only just in time. Achitophel's strategy was coming into play. On his advice Absalom took formal and public possession of his father's household, which in the eyes of the people would constitute him David's successor on the throne. So far so good. Achitophel knew that nothing now remained but to strike a swift, decisive blow. His plan was to muster twelve thousand men and overtake David that night, dispirited and unprepared as he would be, to put his little company to flight by sheer weight of overpowering numbers, and to kill the king only ; whereupon, having no other rallying point, the entire nation would give its allegiance to Absalom. It was a device likely to be entirely successful, and Absalom and the elders approved it. But Chusai had already made a strategic move by the delicate flattery of his submission to Absalom, and the latter, preening himself at the thought that both his father's trusted friends were supporting him, now insisted on hearing what Chusai had also to say to the plan. David's friend realized that David's life probably hung on the inflection of a word, and with magnificent courage and wit he rose to the occasion.

" The counsel that Achitophel has given *this* time is not good," he said calmly. And then in

few but telling strokes he painted a picture of the old warrior king and his seasoned fighting men "very valiant and bitter in their mind, as a bear raging in a wood when her whelps are taken away." His listeners knew David as a soldier. They had never known him other than victorious. Memories crowded in on them. Chusai next pointed out that David would show an old campaigner's caution and would not lodge with the main army; and then he dealt his hammer-blow: *some* would be slain, and the rumour of a rout would inevitably get abroad and spread panic amongst the people, who well knew the valour of David and his men. Disaffection! That is what a usurper most fears. Chusai saw his success and followed it up by counselling caution and long and careful preparation before attack. "And Absalom, and all the men of Israel, said: The counsel of Chusai the Arachite is better than the counsel of Achitophel."

In that bitter moment Achitophel saw his house of cards collapse. Whatever he was seeking when he threw over friendship and honour, he would never gain it now. He was too able a statesman not to recognize defeat when it came. Therefore he "saddled his ass, and arose and went home to his house and to his city, and putting his house in order, hanged himself, and was buried in

the sepulchre of his father." He was wise enough to admit failure, but not man enough to meet it.

Meanwhile David was warned of the rebels' plans, and thousands of loyalists flocked to his standard. Battle was inevitable, so, with a breaking heart, he organized his forces. He remained in the city, and as the men marched forth he charged his captains: "Save me the boy Absalom." Both as king and father those hours were a martyrdom for David. At length came a messenger from the battlefield, a kindly man who had outstripped the first runner that he might break the news gently. At his announcement of victory the agonized father cried: "Is the young man Absalom safe?" "I saw a great tumult, O king. . . I know nothing else." Then came the other messenger: "I bring good tidings, my lord king." Again that anxious cry: "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Now the overwhelming answer: "Let the enemies of my lord the king . . . be as that young man is."

Then David drank the cup of remorse to its dregs. His was the wormwood and the gall of one who is guilty of another's sin, the occasion of another's loss. There burst from his heart an exceeding bitter cry: "My son Absalom, Absalom my son: who would grant that I might die for thee, Absalom, my son, my son."

VII

THE WAGES OF SIN

AMRI, king of Israel, surveyed the walls and towers of his newly built city with justifiable pride. Sheltered by hills, Samaria overlooked a fair valley and was within easy reach of the blue waters of the Great Sea.

"Rightly have I called it 'Watchtower,' son," he said. "It is a strong new city for a strong new dynasty. Moab is at our feet, Syria keeps her distance, the mighty Assyrians themselves treat us with respect. The people need not rue the day, methinks, when they elected a soldier for their king."

"They need not," agreed his son, fervently.

"I look to you to carry on my work, Achab. Israel must grow in power and might. We must needs make prudent alliances as occasion offers. I propose to arrange a marriage for you with Ethbaal of Sidon's daughter. Phœnicia will be an invaluable ally."

Achab's face lit up. "Men say that the princess, Jezabel, is very fair," he said eagerly.

"Like the moon-goddess, Ashtoreth, herself," his father answered. "And remember, son, Israel stands for progress. She must take her place among the nations. We'll say no narrow-minded nay if the lovely Jezabel wishes to build a temple to her gods. Let women have their way in things of little matter. 'Tis ever the easiest plan."

. . . . . .

The sun of an Eastern summer beat down from a brazen sky, parching the grass and herbage, drying up the water-springs. Achab, his eyes aching from the glare, entered the fragrant gloom of his wife's apartments with a sense of grateful relief. Jezabel lay on a couch amid draperies of Tyrian purple, over which her blue-black hair rippled in shining masses. Her slender limbs had a serpentine grace, and her exquisite bare arms, gleaming with gold and jewels, suggested the same sinuous beauty. Slaves stood around her, stirring the perfumed air with fans of peacock plumage. She looked up lazily as her husband entered.

"Well, how goes it, Achab? Your prophets still jealous because my new temple to Baal attracts more worshippers than their countrified rites? Why, man, you look as if you had seen a ghost!"

" One Elias the Thesbite met me but now in the street," Achab answered heavily. " He spoke strange words. I verily believe he is a prophet of Jehovah, like them of old time."

" So Jehovah is envious of Baal ! " sneered Jezabel. " Well, He must look out for Himself. After all, *He* is the interloper. The Phœnician Baalim ruled this land long before your tribes entered it, remember. Why, forsooth, should your God depose ours ? "

" Our great men of old used to tell us that He was all-powerful. Last night, being sleepless, I had some ancient records read to me. One recounted how Jehovah held up the sun in his course at the prayer of our leader, Josue . . . and now Elias the Thesbite threatens me thus, ' As the Lord the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.' " There was a note of awe in Achab's voice which his wife had never heard before.

Jezabel laughed lightly.

" You surely would not pay heed to the threats of a man like that ! " she cried scornfully. " *His* word indeed ! Pray, who is he ? and who, for that matter, is the God of Israel compared with the Baal of Sidon ? So be it. A duel then. I'll stake my life, Achab, and the lives of the sons I

pray Ashtoreth to send me, that in this combat the gods of my royal race will prove conquerors of the God of your slave ancestors."

She sprang from her couch as she uttered her challenge, and flung her arms wide with a clash of golden bracelets.

"A war to the death!" she cried in ringing tones. "Hear, Thou Jehovah! Hear and aid, great Baal and Ashtoreth, whose servants are the life-giving sun and the love-bringing moon, and at whose will the sweet earth brings forth her fruits."

Achab watched her, fascinated. Her grace, her daring, her entrancing loveliness swept him off his feet, banished all other thoughts from his mind. Nor did he consider whither his course of action might lead him when, dismissing him gently after an hour of charm, she said, "Send me my captain of the guard as you go out. You have often told me what a fine soldier your father Amri was, but I know at least one good rule in military tactics: *strike first!* I think there are too many prophets of Jehovah in this land."

. . . . . .

Three years passed and the famine was very grievous. Jezabel had wreaked her vengeance upon the prophets of the Lord, though some had escaped her, she knew not how. More maddening still, Elias the Thesbite could nowhere be

found, though Achab had sent a proclamation throughout the land, swearing in every man to the search.

" Baal has taken vengeance. He has died of famine. Hyenas have picked his bones ! " Jezabel declared. But Achab doubted. He was haunted by the prophet's words and by the terrifying thought that he might be fighting against the All-powerful One. Perchance this grievous famine came from Him who of old time had sent the plagues of Egypt.

One day the king entered his wife's apartments in a deeply despondent mood. " Things are going from bad to worse," he said wearily. " Unless we can find some grass somewhere we shall lose all the beasts. I am going out with Abdias to quarter the land thoroughly."

" I wish you would get rid of that man," Jezabel complained. " I don't trust him. There was something mysterious about the disappearance of those prophets whom my men never found. Who would be so likely to hide them as that fanatical steward, taking advantage of the power you give him ? "

" He is an honest fellow," Achab protested, " no small consideration in these days." And he went out on his errand.

Towards evening he returned. He came to

the queen's room with a lighter step, and a brighter look.

"The gods have taken up your challenge, Jezabel," he said. "Now we shall surely see an end of this drought. Something is bound to happen, one way or another."

"Tell me, quick!" Jezabel sat up, her eyes flashing.

"I set out with Abdias this morning, he going one way, I another. Presently he came after me, hastening as one who bears a message. 'Speak!' I bade him, and he told me that Elias had met him in the way and craved an audience of me. I went to meet the fellow. 'Ah, is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?' I said sternly. He had the effrontery to retort that this famine is due to *me,* forsooth, for allowing the worship of Baal. He then suggested that he should meet the priests of Baal in combat, as it were: they to prepare a sacrifice to their god, he to prepare one to his, that in the sight of all the people it might be seen which god is the more powerful."

"Splendid!" Jezabel cried. "Nothing could be better. At last this troublesome fellow shall meet the fate he deserves."

So Achab sent messengers throughout the land, summoning the prophets to Mount Carmel.

On the appointed day the king departed for the scene of the contest, and the queen awaited results in the palace at Jezrahel. She was triumphant. Who could doubt the issue? One uncouth, half-savage man from who-knows-where against the four hundred and fifty cultured prophets of Baal, to say nothing of her household priests. Was not Baal lord of the land and were not the elements his servants? He would undoubtedly give some signal display of force to vindicate his rights.

As soon as the heat of the day was passed Jezabel went up to the roof-garden of the palace and looked eagerly towards Mount Carmel. Low down over the sea there was a little cloud, the size of a man's hand. She watched, fascinated, as cloud on cloud piled itself up until the heavens grew black, and a mighty storm-wind drove them like racing galleons across the sky. A heavy drop of rain fell, then another and another. Baal had answered. What was that moving speck in the distance? A man running swiftly. A gaunt figure, clad in skins, flying for shelter to the city. Elias, of a surety! Beaten! Coming to sue for pity. Hark!—the thud of hoofs, the rattle of chariot wheels. Achab's arabs stretched out like greyhounds, racing the storm. What splendid news he will have to tell!

" Quick, slaves ! My perfumed bath. Then bring the gold-wrought robe."

In rich array, looking her loveliest, Jezabel received her lord. Achab appeared as one half dazed, yet withal strangely exalted.

" So Baal has answered ? " cried the queen. " Tell me the details, Achab, I am longing to hear."

" *The God that answereth by fire, let Him be God,*" said the king slowly, as one repeating a lesson.

" Yes, yes. And who should answer by fire—yea and by water, hark to the rain !—except Baal, lord of the earth ? "

" Elias had two bullocks brought," Achab continued. " The priests of Baal chose one and prepared it for a burnt-offering. They cried aloud all day until evening, *but there was neither voice nor any that regarded.* Elias then prepared his sacrifice and caused much water to be poured over and around it. Then he drew near and prayed thus : ' O Lord God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Israel, show this day that Thou art the God of Israel, and I thy servant.' Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench around the altar." Achab's voice had a solemn ring and there was an unwonted dignity upon his brow.

Jezabel sat dumbfounded. " And the prophets of Baal ? " she asked faintly.

" Elias slew them all at the brook Cison. Not one of them escaped."

Then the queen leapt to her feet with the snarl of a tigress. She clapped her hands and her eunuchs entered.

" Go on the instant to Elias the Thesbite, and say to him, ' Thus saith the queen : So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of those murdered ones by to-morrow about this time.' "

Next day, however, when Jezabel's men went to take him, Elias could not be found. He was traced through Juda down to Beer-sheba, and thence the wilderness covered his tracks.

. . . . . .

Achab's lingering reverence for the God of his fathers faded away at length under Jezabel's influence. The low morality and easy self-indulgence which Baal-worship permitted made a strong appeal to his weak nature. He gradually lost all sense of moral values, caring for nothing but the passing interests of the hour.

One day it was told Jezabel that the king lay on his couch, refusing food. The despondent weakling into which her husband had developed

was an unwelcome and unforeseen result of her policy. She hastened to his room.

"Why, Achab! What means this?"

He was accustomed to rely upon her strength. In the complaining tones of an undisciplined child he told her a petty tale. One Naboth, it seemed, had a vineyard which Achab desired for a garden, but the man refused to part with it on any terms because, forsooth, it was family property—an incomprehensible reason to this king of mean origin. Jezabel tried to rouse him:

"Are you a king for nothing, then?" she taunted. "Eat and be merry. *I* will give you the vineyard."

Then she wrote letters in the king's name to the governors of the city, ordering them to carry out a dastardly plan whereby Naboth should be falsely accused of blasphemy and stoned to death. Everyone knew well by this time who ruled the kingdom, even though, for form's sake, she made use of the king's seal. No one who valued his life would care to withstand the queen, and Baal-worship did not breed heroes. In due course they brought the message: "Naboth is stoned and is dead."

Then, with the scorn of the bold for the craven, Jezabel stung her husband into action: "Arise,

take possession of Naboth's vineyard, for he is dead!"

Whipped by her words, ashamed, and anxious to hide his shame, Achab ordered his chariot and drove to his new property. After a time, impatient that he had not come to her rejoicing and grateful, Jezabel asked her attendants: "Has my lord returned?" They went to inquire and told her, "Yes."

"Where is he then?"

"He keeps his chamber."

Puzzled and angry, Jezabel swept in search of him. A strange sight met her eyes. With clothes rent, covered in sack-cloth, food left untouched, Achab lay upon the ground. Nor would he rise and speak to her for all her storming.

"What has come to him?" she demanded of the frightened slaves. "Find out who accompanied the chariot and send them to me."

Two men of the household guard were soon ushered into her presence.

"Did you witness aught when you attended my lord this day?"

"We did, O queen."

"Speak, men."

"It is ill hearing, O queen."

"Speak, I say."

Then the man they named Jehu spoke:

" As my lord the king viewed the vineyard Elias the Thesbite appeared before him, and the king exclaimed at sight of him: 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' The prophet answered, 'I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to do evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold *I* will bring evil upon *thee*, and will cut off from Achab every man child, and . . .'" the soldier hesitated.

" Go on, man."

" 'And the dogs shall eat Jezabel by the ramparts of Jezrahel' . . . Therefore, because of these words, my lord Achab now humbleth himself before his God."

" Coward!" Jezabel cried. " But you, Jehu, are at least a brave man to face me with such words. Wherefore I spare your life."

. . . . . .

Achab was dead, slain in battle with the Syrians. Men said that he died like a hero. Jezabel did not regret him. Her hopes were centred on her sons. They would surely follow her policy, despite their deplorable names—" Jehovah holds " and " Jehovah is high "—due to their father's spasmodic fits of ancestral piety. Ha! what of that horrible prophecy now? It was the puling, repentant Achab who was dead!

. . . . . .

Ochozias lay on his couch, unable to move. He had fallen from a window of an upper chamber in his palace at Samaria.

"Son," Jezabel counselled, "send messengers to Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, to enquire as to thy recovery. He will look favourably on one so devoted to him."

The messengers speedily returned. A man had met them, bidding them go back and say to the king: "Is there no God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baal-zebub? Now therefore thus saith the Lord: thou shalt surely die."

"What manner of man was he?" asked Ochozias.

"A hairy man, girt with a girdle of leather about his loins."

"It is Elias the Thesbite!"

"Send and take him!" cried Jezabel.

. . . . . .

Twelve years had passed since the death of Ochozias, and now the queen-mother sat by the couch of her younger son, who had come to Jezrahel to heal him of wounds got in battle. Unlike his brother, Joram cared nothing for the worship of Baal but thought only of war. Nor could he be induced to exterminate the successor of Elias, but, on the contrary, accepted his help in matters of state. Jezabel, however, rejoiced

to think that Baal had taken vengeance on the Thesbite. He was last seen in the desert beyond Jordan, about the time when a whirlwind was raging. Men said, too, that fire had fallen from heaven, and that nothing but his cloak was ever found thereafter.

A stir at the door. Slaves ushering in the king of Juda, come to ask after the health of his kinsman. Then, rudely interrupting the royal courtesies, the hurried entry of a soldier :

" My lord, the watchman reports the advance of an armed company."

" Send a horseman to enquire their purpose," commanded Joram.

A little later :

" My lord, the horseman hath reached them and cometh not again."

" Despatch another."

Then a further message :

" My lord, the second horseman cometh not again, and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Namsi, for he driveth furiously."

Then Jezabel :

" Go forth to meet him, Joram, thou and thy cousin of Juda. Teach the upstart his place."

The kings went forth, and after a while men brought tidings. The rebel captain had slain his lord in the field still called Naboth's, beyond

the city gates. Now he was marching on the city itself.

Marching on it, was he? But he had reckoned without Jezabel. No man could withstand her charm if she chose to allure. She would enchant him, take him captive, and then avenge the slain. Her slaves worked swiftly, skilfully hiding the ravages of time.

The clatter of hoofs. They are coming. Jezabel leaned out of her window. Then the old contempt blazed forth:

"Ha! another Zimri!" she taunted.

But Jehu was not sensitive to beauty or to scorn.

"Who is on my side?" he asked briefly. Then, as two or three eunuchs looked forth,

"Throw her down."

And they threw her down.

VIII

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ISAIAS

AMONG the great men who helped to mould the Hebrew nation the figure of Isaias is prominent. He contributed as much as any of his predecessors (probably more than anyone except Moses), and in many respects his was a harder task than theirs.

Though on Abraham fell the responsibility of the initial effort he had the support of faithful followers ; though Moses had to develop a mob of slaves into a united people he possessed the necessary training, power, and authority for his task. Josue had a loyal army behind him ; Samuel's commands were recognized as those of Jehovah ; Elias was free to hurl denunciations and depart in majestic wrath ; but to Isaias was given the hardest task which can fall to the lot of man : he had to guide without any authority to command ; he could foresee disaster without any power to avert it ; he had to lead those who could not govern and would not be governed ; and he was unable to leave them to their fate, for their

ruin would mean likewise the ruin of the people of God.

We know nothing about Isaias except what he himself tells us, and the first incident which he records is one which was in itself a new birth: his vision in the Temple and Jehovah's commission to himself. But we can gauge his character from his writings, and we have a rabbinic tradition that he was of royal blood which is in harmony with his career. Indeed his evident influence at court gives weight to the supposition that he was the nephew of King Amasias and hence a kinsman of the succeeding monarchs in whose reigns he lived.

In order to form a just estimate of Isaias' character and work we must understand the political and religious condition of the times. We may well begin this review with a striking and tragic incident, of which Isaias was doubtless a spectator. A group of men are watching, in stern silence, the entry of the King of Juda into the royal city of Jerusalem. For fifteen years that very city has been a reproach to him, with its broken walls and rifled treasures, disasters due to his foolish challenge of his powerful neighbour, Israel. And now his reign ends in unimagined disgrace, for Amasias "had revolted from the Lord,' and fled from his outraged

people, who had pursued and overtaken him and meted out just punishment. He comes, with a guard of mounted men, but it is his dead body which they are escorting.

"The king is dead! Long live the king!" The young prince Ozias is crowned. In his gallant cousin, Isaias had a king worthy of his allegiance, and that would mean all the world to him with his poet's soul and student's mind. He had pondered the marvellous history of his people, mysteriously aware of their high destiny, though not as yet called to play his part in guiding them towards it. He knew that the Hebrews were God's peculiar people and that they had a mission to the heathen nations. But how were they fulfilling that mission? Ten of the tribes had forsaken the house of David and formed a separate kingdom, in which idolatry was rampant. The hope of the world lay in Juda, but, alas, Amasias had failed, as had his father before him. Would Ozias prove a worthy occupant of the throne?

At first it seemed that he was indeed a second David. Military prowess and good government marked his reign. Israel under Jereboam, and Juda under Ozias, attained a degree of prosperity which they had never before known. Their enemies ceased to trouble them, the arts of

peace flourished, there was a rapid increase of wealth.

We can picture, then, Isaias seeking in Ozias the ideal king, and we can imagine his feelings when that king, on a day, entered the Temple and stated his determination to offer incense as a priest. Was he not the greatest in the land? None should withstand him. In vain the priests protested. Ozias marched into the Holy Place, right up to the altar of incense, and swung his censer boldly, regardless of the breathless cry: "Do not insult the Lord!" Then, as they moved to thrust him forth, "himself being also frighted, hastened to go out, because he had quickly felt the stroke of the Lord." And he remained a leper until the day of his death.

The impression which this made upon Isaias can be gathered from the way in which he dates the most stupendous event of his own life: "In the year that King Ozias died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and elevated: and his train filled the temple. Upon it stood the Seraphim . . . and they cried one to another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of Hosts, all the earth is full of his glory."

It would seem that Isaias was meditating in the Temple upon the close of that ruined life, trying to realize something of the majesty of Jehovah

who had so swiftly punished sacrilege, the Holy One whose servant the nation was pledged to be. Then came the blinding revelation of the immediate presence of God, and we see what that moment's insight taught Isaias' receptive heart. " Woe is me," he cried, " because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people that hath unclean lips, and I have seen with my eyes the King, the Lord of Hosts." The knowledge of God brought acknowledgment of sin, but sacramental cleansing followed on confession : " And one of the Seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a live coal . . . and he touched my mouth and said : Behold this hath touched thy lips . . . and thy sin shall be cleansed." Then came his vocation and response : " And I heard the voice of the Lord saying : Whom shall I send. . . And I said : Lo, here am I, send me. And he said : Go." Not to an easy task, but to a people who would not hear nor see nor turn ; to a toil well-nigh fruitless, to a labour well-nigh lost ; yet in the end a tithing should be saved, a holy seed should remain.

Ozias was succeeded by Joatham, who had a short, uneventful reign. Then his son Achaz, a youth of twenty, came to the throne. He was a weak, unprincipled boy, and Isaias foresaw grave danger ahead. For a reigning king in those days

really ruled, his will was law, counsellors could do no more than advise, the people themselves had no means of making their will known except by forcibly executing it when driven beyond endurance, as not infrequently happened. The times required a strong and prudent policy if the nation were to weather the approaching storm. Israel and Syria had formed an alliance against Juda, and the people and their foolish young king were so terrified at this danger near at hand that they were blindly rushing into a far greater peril. The mighty Assyrian empire was reaching forth to absorb the small western states, and the attack of the Syrians and Ephramites on Juda seems to have been prompted by a desire to force Achaz into alliance with them or else supplant him by a nominee of their own. To combine against Assyria was foolish because futile, but Achaz's policy was simply suicidal, for he had determined to appeal for help to Assyria against his neighbours. When once that empire fastened on a little nation it was gradually assimilated or dispersed.

"And the Lord said to Isaias: Go forth to meet Achaz, thou and Jasub thy son . . . to the conduit of the upper pool.... And thou shalt say to him: See thou be quiet: fear not, and let not thy heart be afraid of the two tails of these firebrands."

It was a dramatic meeting. Achaz, surveying the city's water supply in view of a siege, is met by the commanding figure of his noble kinsman, accompanied by his young son with the symbolic name, " A remnant shall return." For Isaias' message is that amid the perils of the moment safety lay solely in confidence in Jehovah. Israel and Syria are but smouldering torches whose power is exhausted. Juda must remain quiet and aloof, then the clash of empires will pass her by. The real danger is Assyria, who is bent on a war of conquest. Do not cross her path as she hunts her prey. In order to strengthen his faith at this difficult moment the Lord will grant Achaz any sign which he may ask.

But the last thing that Achaz wished was to be convinced that his policy was wrong. He was quite determined to pursue it. Therefore, with feigned piety, he exclaimed, " I will not ask, and I will not tempt the Lord." But he could not hoodwink Isaias. " Hear ye therefore," he cried sternly, " the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel. He shall eat butter and honey . . . before the child know to refuse the evil and to choose the good, the land which thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of the face of her two kings."

It was an utterance with a two-fold meaning. First, the wonderful Messianic prophecy, the significance of which Isaias doubtless understood but dimly and Achaz not at all, and secondly a political forecast which, in its fulfilment, would indeed be a sign to the obstinate monarch. To the latter it simply meant that within a few years the land would be laid waste by hostile armies. A young girl, about to be married, would have a son who should be called by a symbolic name (as were Isaias' own sons), and before this child should have attained the use of reason the land would have gone out of cultivation, milk from the herd and wild honey being the only food, and the two kings whom Achaz feared would be no more. For " the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost parts of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria, and they shall come, and shall all of them rest in the torrents of the valleys, and in the holes of the rocks." What a picture of invading armies ! If Achaz persists in his policy, " The Lord shall shave with a razor that is hired," *i.e.*, Achaz hires help from Assyria and he will cut his own fingers. His land shall be utterly laid waste. But beside the stern prophet stands Jasub : " A remnant shall return."

Achaz, however, with the obstinacy of the

weak, carried out his plans. He offered allegiance to Assyria, which promptly came to his aid and crushed Syria. One can imagine the short-sighted rejoicings which ensued, despite the fact that Achaz was summoned to Damascus to do homage to his overlord, thus riveting upon his kingdom the heavy yoke of the great heathen empire. The writings of Isaias and Micheas describe the result of this disastrous policy. Isaias shows how it affected Jerusalem, Micheas depicts the bitter sufferings of the country people. In the east it is the poor who are the tax-payers, and the raising of the annual tribute to Assyria was a crushing burden, which greatly aggravated the existing social miseries. Isaias voices his indignation at the sins and follies of the capital, the luxury of the rich, the wickedness of those who "grind the faces of the poor." Micheas burns with rage against those who "have coveted fields and taken them by violence." Injustice is rife, there is no redress for the wrongs of the poor. Both prophets proclaim the anger of Jehovah and approaching doom.

With the loss of true religion superstition invariably raises its head, no less now than in past ages. Achaz openly practised degrading idolatries and the people followed suit. Isaias, with the soul of a saint and the heart of a mystic and the

mind of a cultured statesman, had to stand by, powerless to control, while his nation committed political and religious suicide.

Then Achaz died and his son Ezechias reigned in his stead.

IX

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ISAIAS

(continued)

THE accession of Ezechias to the throne of Juda must have caused great joy to those of his countrymen who were faithful to the God of their fathers, for " he did that which was pleasing in the sight of the Lord." At once he set about religious reforms, demolishing the local sanctuaries which were centres of heathen cults, destroying idols and restoring and improving the temple services. He even went so far as to destroy, with a fine sanity, that venerable relic, Moses' brazen serpent, because it had now become an object of superstition. One suspects that Isaias' balanced judgment prompted this move. The first years of the new reign were peaceful and prosperous. The king fortified and improved Jerusalem, held the Philistines in check and encouraged the fine arts. But the country, of course, still bore the burden of vassalage to Assyria, Achaz's unwelcome legacy ; and Juda soon received an impressive object-lesson on the outcome of revolt.

Osee of Israel, persuaded by Egyptian influence and in defiance of the warnings of the prophets, refused his annual tribute; whereupon an Assyrian army besieged Samaria and took it after a three years' siege. Most of the inhabitants of the land were then deported to different districts beyond the Euphrates and the conquerors sent their own colonists to occupy the captured province. Israel was no more. Despite this warning a political party in Juda was anxious to form an alliance with Egypt against Assyria. Only Isaias' commanding influence prevented Ezechias from acceding to this suicidal policy; yet the warnings multiplied and the power of Assyria in dealing with local revolts showed daily more irresistible.

For Isaias it must have been like living on a volcano. Ezechias, though talented, good-hearted, and amenable to guidance, was easily swayed by any powerful appeal, open to flattery, hasty in action. And there on the threshold was the mighty Assyrian Empire, ready to turn and rend in a moment of irritation, while Egypt kept the small neighbouring states in a ferment of simmering rebellion so that Juda was daily tempted to follow suit and blind her eyes to the consequences.

When Ezechias had reigned some fourteen years an incident occurred which showed both the strength and the weakness of his character.

He fell ill, and Isaias was sent to prepare him for death. The king accepted his sentence meekly but sorrowfully, and then with childlike confidence turned to the Lord and begged for a reprieve.

The Lord heard the king's petition, and sent Isaias to promise him fifteen more years in the world, and deliverance from that ever pressing peril, the Assyrians. Ezechias frankly asked for a sign, his ingenuous attitude being in striking contrast to Achaz's refusal of proof. Isaias promptly offered one, the shadow on the sun-dial should go backwards or forwards, just as he wished. "Backwards," said Ezechias, "that would be a much greater sign," just as a child would choose. It has been conjectured that this "dial of Achaz" may have been a platform surrounded by steps and surmounted by a pillar, the shadow of which fell upon a larger or smaller number of steps as the sun mounted or declined. The alteration in the length of the sun's shadow might be produced by a partial eclipse. But the event would still be miraculous because neither Prophet nor King had power to know the approach of an eclipse. God can and does work miracles by suspending some of His own "natural laws" that others may have play; or again, He can produce effects directly which are outside the power of all natural laws.

But that simple-mindedness which is charming in a child may be alarming in the head of a State in a time of intricate intrigues. Merodach-Baladan, the prince of a small state in South Babylonia, had thrown off his allegiance to Assyria some years previously and had managed to maintain his independence and hold the throne of Babylon. But now Assyria, under Sargon, was obviously aiming at world-wide conquest, and this astute Chaldean probably felt that Juda would be useful as an ally or a foil. He therefore sent an embassy to Ezechias on the pretext of congratulating him upon his recovery and enquiring into the miracle which had signalized it. The Chaldeans were great astronomers and any movement of the heavenly bodies would interest them. Ezechias received the embassy with effusion and displayed all his treasures, which was really like letting a fox into a farmyard. The visitors must have smiled contentedly, viewing the display as so much possible loot or tribute.

Ezechias, however, saw them depart in a glow of satisfaction, feeling much the greater in his own eyes for the fancied admiration in theirs. Then Isaias appeared. " What said these men and from whence came they to thee ? " he asked sternly.

" From a far country they came to me, from Babylon."

"What saw they in thy house?" came the next searching question, and the king, crestfallen, told his tale of pitiful vanity.

"And Isaias said to Ezechias: Hear the word of the Lord of Hosts. Behold, the days shall come that all that is in thy house . . . shall be carried away into Babylon."

Meanwhile any projects formed by Ezechias or Merodach-Baladan were speedily rendered futile by the defeat of the latter by Sargon. Rebellion still seethed around Palestine. Azotus refused tribute and shared the fate of Samaria. Despite these proofs of the power of Assyria the pro-Egyptian party in Juda gained strength, and the Lord told Isaias to warn them of their danger in dramatic fashion. He paraded the streets in the scanty garb of a captive, proclaiming: "So shall the king of the Assyrians lead away the prisoners of Egypt." He was able to control the national policy for some six years longer. Then Sargon was assassinated and Sennacherib succeeded him. Merodach-Baladan again revolted and whilst Assyria was engaged with him Ezechias yielded to the Egyptian party and withheld his yearly tribute from the northern Empire. Most of the vassal-states of Palestine followed his example. So intense was the feeling that Padi, king of Ekron, who remained loyal to Assyria, was seized by his

subjects, and handed over to Ezechias. Jerusalem went wild with joy, riotous and misguided mirth digging its own grave, as Isaias describes it for us in his twenty-second chapter.

The joy was indeed short-lived. Possibly Ezechias, with a weak man's love of a flatterer, still cherished a belief in Merodach-Baladan's prowess, and thought that he could withstand Sennacherib and would support Juda. But Assyria speedily reduced Babylon and then marched into Phœnicia. The little states collapsed, the rebellious towns were taken, the loyal Padi was restored to his throne. Then vengeance fell on Juda. We have Sennacherib's own account. He tells us that forty-six fenced cities and smaller towns " without number " were captured, and over 200,000 persons carried into slavery. Jerusalem was besieged and only spared on payment of an enormous ransom, to raise which Ezechias had to strip the doors and pillars of the temple of their brass and gold. With what grief Isaias must have seen this vindication of his policy.

The Assyrian army withdrew and the main body engaged in a campaign on the borders of Egypt. But Sennacherib apparently reflected that Jerusalem might give him further trouble ; so he despatched troops, under three of his principal officers, to demand the surrender of the city. In

4 Kings xviii. we have a most graphic account of the parley which ensued between Sennacherib's Rabsaces ("chief of the captains") and the citizens of Jerusalem. The Assyrian officer tried both intimidation and cajolery, but the people "answered him not a word." In this crisis Ezechias once more showed the redeeming strain in his character; he humbly asked help of the Lord and counsel from His prophet. Isaias gave him encouragement: there was nothing to fear, Sennacherib would return to his own country. But when the Rabsaces told his master that Jerusalem would not surrender he found him in no mood to stomach a rebuff. Sennacherib had just heard that Tirhakah of Egypt was marching against him, and this matter of Jerusalem must be settled forthwith. So he sent back a letter, peremptorily demanding submission. Ezechias saw clearly where his policy had led him and he now did the only possible thing. He took the letter to the temple and "spread it before the Lord," asking humbly and trustfully for help. The answer came by the word of Isaias:

"Thus saith the Lord concerning the king of the Assyrians: he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow into it: nor come before it with shield, nor cast a trench about it. . . . I will

protect this city, and will save it for my own sake and for David my servant's sake.

"And it came to pass that night that an angel of the Lord came, and slew in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and eighty-five thousand. . . . And Sennacherib king of the Assyrians departing went away."

It is thought that a sudden outbreak of pestilence was probably the means used by God.

There was no further invasion of Juda, but on the other hand Ezechias continued to pay tribute. Assyria was by this time over-lord of Egypt, and no small state could withstand this great power. So Manasses inherited the burden when he succeeded his father.

And now the life of the great prophet Isaias ended in apparent failure, tradition says in actual martyrdom.

Manasses' reign was long and evil and marked by revolt against Isaias' teaching, and fierce religious persecution. The people expected material assistance from Jehovah, help which would sweep away the troubles which the nation had brought on itself. They were not content simply to be saved from annihilation and given opportunities of spiritual regeneration. The old idolatries reappeared in full force and the adherents of Jehovah were massacred. It is believed that

Isaias himself suffered martyrdom by being sawn asunder.

But he whose name means "Salvation of the Lord," and whose pen drew that marvellous portrait of our Divine Redeemer, may receive our homage but not our pity. Throughout his book runs the golden thread of hope: God rules the world, nations are His instruments, a remnant shall be saved, forgiveness may be found. And so, though the sun of his life set in a dark hour, his vivid faith heard other words than those of the howling mob.

"Arise . . . for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

X

JEREMIAS

WE think of a jubilee as an occasion for rejoicing, but when Manasses, King of Juda, had reigned for fifty years there was no longer any cause for joy throughout the land. His reign had begun with a fierce religious persecution in which most of those who were true to the God of their fathers suffered martyrdom. The rest of the people gave themselves up to every form of idolatry. Now, in the courts of the Temple itself, stood the chariot and horses of the Babylonian Sun-God as well as wooden pillars erected to the Sidonian goddess Astarte. Baal was worshipped in the country places as lord of crops and herds; even Moloch worship with its sacrifice of children had been revived. To all apearance there was no hope for the nation; none suspected that that hope lay with two baby boys: Prince Amon's little heir, and the infant son of a country priest. Josias came to the throne at the age of eight, and it was soon seen, with deep thankfulness, that he took after his great-grandfather Ezechias rather

than his father and grandfather. While he was carefully reared at court, a greater than he in the neighbouring village of Anathoth was receiving his education at the hands of God Himself.

God's servants are usually put to school in quiet places. Moses was driven from the court and camp into the wilderness. St. Paul, the townsman, sought the desert of Arabia after his conversion; St. John Baptist was reared in the wilderness; Our Blessed Lord went thither. It was these same winds and skies and wide spaces which made the background of Jeremias' boyhood. His family was descended from Heli and had owned property in Anathoth since the days of Solomon. The little boy would learn from his father the splendid history of his nation and God's dealings with His people; as he grew older he would hear something of the politics of the time, for Anathoth was near enough to Jerusalem, that "tryst of the winds," to get all the news. Assyria, which had destroyed Israel and had come near to wrecking Juda, was now of little account; but there were rumours of a new danger: hordes of wild horsemen from beyond the northern mountains were making raids south-westward, and the Chaldeans were becoming increasingly powerful. Any nation strong enough to do so would make the fertile land of Palestine its prey, and now that

Juda was riddled with idolatry how could she expect help from the Lord ?

In times of peril Jehovah had often sent His people a guide, and now the call came to the young Jeremias : " Before I formed thee . . . I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and made thee a prophet unto the nations." Like all who receive these intimate and awful honours, Jeremias shrank away in fear and humility : " Ah Lord God, behold I cannot speak, for I am a child." But his youth and inexperience were to be no excuse. " Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee ; and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak." Then he tells us " the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth ; and the Lord said to me : Behold, I have given my words in thy mouth." Here is the secret of the amazing courage which this highly-strung, sensitive man displays throughout his life.

With the divine commission came a new power of interpreting things and events. No doubt that first sign of spring, the delicate almond bloom on its leafless branch, had brought a message of hope to Jeremias year by year, but now it took on a new meaning. " What seest thou ? " the Lord asked him. " I see a rod watching," *i.e.*, the " wake tree " or almond. " Thou hast seen well, for I

will watch over my word to perform it"; as much as to say, "Trouble is at hand, but 'if winter come shall spring be far behind?'" His next vision was another homely sight, a cauldron boiling over, and the Lord told him, "From the north shall an evil break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land."

In those days and for hundreds of years to come anyone who would teach the "man in the street" must do so by songs and stories, things easily remembered, for a person's library was his memory; books, written by hand on sheepskin rolls, were few and expensive, and only the learned could read. So now Jeremias began to compose a series of sermon-songs in beautiful rhythmic verse. In these first poems (chaps. ii. 2–iv. 4) the prophet reminds the people of God's goodness and their own unfaithfulness, and he urges them to repentance. In all his writings Jeremias draws illustrations from everyday life: a girl would never forget her ornaments, yet the people have forgotten God; they have rushed after heathen gods as cattle will break away to the wilderness; they have refused to serve like a refractory draught-ox; their repentance must be thorough if it is to be of any use; he bids them "break up your fallow ground, sow not upon thorns."

The next series of poems (iv. 5–vi. 29) describes the dangers which may come from invading enemies. The methods of the raiding Scythians and the Chaldean siege tactics are described. Jeremias had a wonderful grasp of the events of the day as well as a poet's eye for nature.

Meanwhile the young king Josias was trying to pull the kingdom into shape. He ordered the thorough repair of the Temple, and while this was going on the high priest discovered the "book of the law," which had probably been hidden for safety in the days of Manasses. The book was read to the king and it made a deep impression on him. It was our Deuteronomy, or at least a part of it, and it taught how Jehovah wished to be served and condemned those very heathen practices which had become general. It spurred on Josias in his efforts at reform, and he enforced the ancient law which enacted that the people should worship at Jerusalem only. This meant that the country priests had to come into the city, and probably Jeremias' family now moved thither. Fifteen years of national peace and prosperity followed. Then disaster fell.

The Assyrian empire, Egypt's old enemy, had at last gone down before the Medes and Chaldeans and Necho of Egypt thought he would like a share of the spoils. So he started north with a great

army, travelling along the coast of Palestine and across the plain of Esdraelon, the usual military route. He did not touch Juda on his way, and he seems to have been quite as puzzled as we are to-day by Josias' action in attacking him near Megiddo. Necho flatly told him not to interfere, it was no business of his ; but Josias persisted, his little army was routed and he himself slain. With him died Juda's last chance of recovery. He had been a good king and there was no one to take his place. *Why* he acted thus no one knows. The most probable cause seems to be spiritual pride. He may have felt that as he had served Jehovah well so He was bound to protect him in his battles with the heathen. We can imagine what a crushing blow this was to Jeremias. Henceforth trouble after trouble fell on this saintly servant of God, who has been called " the likest to Christ of all the prophets."

Josias' son, Joachaz, was crowned ; but Egypt was now thoroughly angry, and Necho removed him and put his brother in his place, exacting a heavy yearly tribute from the country. The people relapsed into idolatry and Joakim proved to be a weak and wicked king, extravagant and cruel. " Woe to him that buildeth up his house by injustice," Jeremias told him when he made the people give forced labour on his new palace.

There was no love lost between king and prophet, and Jeremias had now many enemies besides among the priests and professional prophets. They hated him for preaching the need for spiritual reformation and for prophesying coming doom. Despite all this, when the Lord told Jeremias to go to the Temple and publicly foretell its destruction and that of Jerusalem, he took his life in his hand and did so. The authorities arrested him and nearly murdered him, but he was rescued by the people.

Meanwhile his prophecies were coming true. Egypt and Babylon met in battle at Carchemish and Babylon won ; whereupon Nebuchadnezzar marched southwards and made Joakim *his* vassal instead of Necho's. Doom *was* coming from the north. Jeremias was now commanded to put his oracles in writing, so he sought out a scribe (Baruch, who became his fast friend), dictated his poems and told Baruch to read them publicly. Baruch obeyed and it caused a great commotion. The princes had the roll read to them and they felt they ought to show it to the king ; but they knew the royal temper, and so they first sent Jeremias and Baruch into hiding. They found Joakim sitting by a lighted brazier, for it was winter time. As the roll was read to him he grew so angry that as each three or four columns were finished he cut them up with his penknife and

threw them into the fire. When they told the prophet of this vandalism he simply re-dictated the oracles with additions here and there as recent events required.

About this time Jeremias was shown a new method of teaching: by acted parables. The first was shown to him by God, then he was told to act others for the people. He felt prompted to go down to the potter's house and watch him at work; there God told him that He could mould nations as the potter moulded his clay. Then Jeremias had to buy an earthen jar and take some of the priests and elders with him to the Potsherd Gate of the city and cast the jar into the valley below, explaining that God would destroy Jerusalem in like manner; he was then to repeat this warning in the Temple. As a consequence, the chief of the Temple police put him in the stocks; but as soon as he was released next day he turned on him and told him that he himself should be carried captive to Babylon and die there. No bully ever succeeded in frightening Jeremias.

Meanwhile the foolish Joakim, and after him his son, refused tribute to Assyria. Nebuchadnezzar lost patience, invaded Juda and carried into exile king, nobles, and all skilful and able-bodied men. He made Mathanias king, changing his name to Sedecias ("Truth of the Lord"),

meaning to bind him by the name of his own God to keep faith with his overlord. But Sedecias was too weak to keep faith with anyone. He had a half-superstitious respect for Jeremias, but he was swayed by any party which chose to exert influence over him. He was soon persuaded to intrigue with Egypt and revolt against Babylon, whereupon Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem.

Jeremias had now a most bitter task. He, an ardent patriot, knew that it was his duty to counsel the king to surrender. No allegiance was due to Sedecias, for he held his throne from Nebuchadnezzar; resistance meant misery for many; further, the Chaldeans were executing God's punishment of His apostate people. Throughout the siege Sedecias asked counsel of Jeremias and each time refused to follow it. Jeremias always told him the same thing: "Resistance is useless, submit." But the only result was that the prophet nearly lost his life from the fury of the revolutionaries and the weakness of the king. He was imprisoned most of the time, first in a noisome dungeon where he almost starved, and then in the guard-court, where he preached from behind his bars until his enemies in a fury of rage flung him into an old cistern, the bottom of which was deep with mire. Doubtless

they hoped that no one would find him. But a negro servant from the palace discovered him and went to the king for an order for his release. One suspects that Jeremias had been kind to this man on whom others looked with scorn. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin?" he had asked, as if to point out that colour was no sin, whereas the men of Juda would not change their wicked hearts. He had evidently won this black man's heart, for with remarkable thoughtfulness he took some old clothes and threw them down to Jeremias that he might put them under his armpits that the ropes might not cut him when they drew him up.

Scorned and hated by his countrymen, Jeremias was respected by the Babylonians, and special orders were given for his safety when the city fell. The leaders were put to death and most of the people carried captive to Babylon; but a remnant were left under the governorship of Jeremias' friend Gedaliah. All might yet have been saved, and doubtless the prophet's hopes revived; for it is thought that his "Oracles of hope" (xxx., xxxi.) were written at this time. But Juda was rotten to the core and unteachable; only the furnace of affliction could purify the nation. Gedaliah was murdered and the people, panic-stricken and fearing Nebuchadnezzar's vengeance,

fled to Egypt, taking the aged prophet with them. Tradition says that he died a martyr's death. We catch a glimpse of him at Tahpanhes, fighting to the last. His indomitable spirit and unfailing confidence are the more amazing when we remember that under the Old Dispensation even the greatest could only see "in a dark manner." What must it have been for Jeremias when at last he saw "face to face"?

XI

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

THROUGHOUT the whole Bible the idea of God as the Shepherd of His people runs like a golden thread. From David to the Son of David, through the Prophets and up to the Epistles, this lovely simile occurs and recurs. In primitive days it was a figure of speech which made an instant appeal to everyone. A man's wealth lay in his flocks and herds; and when fewer people lived their lives bounded by city walls the shepherd and his flock were exceedingly familiar objects. These Eastern parables, however, show us a much more intimate relationship between shepherd and sheep than is usual in Western lands, so that, in order that we may understand the full beauty of these allegories, it is worth while to consider them in the light of Eastern shepherd life.

The twenty-second psalm gives us a detailed picture of the shepherd's day, which is what we might expect from a shepherd-poet. "The Lord ruleth me and I shall want nothing," sings David,

and he goes on to depict all the provision which he himself makes for his flock; the "place of pasture," the "waters of refreshment," the protection afforded in "the shadow of death," the "rod and staff" for defence and correction, the healing oil, the refreshing cup. For shepherding in that land and day was adventurous; it was no case of keeping a flock in a well-fenced field with water and grass, roots and linseed cake, at will. Our fat, hand-fed sheep are little more than well-tended caged animals; the Eastern flock foraged with its shepherd, running to his cry of "Ta-a-a, ho-o-o" like a pack of hounds. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me," said Our Blessed Lord.

He was describing a picture familiar to His hearers, perhaps even then being enacted before their eyes. The sheepfolds of Palestine are walled enclosures sufficiently strong to keep out beasts of prey, which once abounded there; the caves of the limestone range and the gorge of the Jordan provided them with good cover, and there was plenty of game. In the time of Christ there were still wolves, hyenas, jackals, and possibly other beasts, for in earlier days bears, lions, and leopards were numerous. So the shepherd folded his flock at night and lay on guard by the door. In the morning he led them forth, going on ahead,

the sheep following, for he had to lead them to their pasture, and also to guard against the perils of the way.

The pasture itself must be sought for and made safe in advance. It was a rocky land and herbage was scarce, and it was advisable, moreover, to examine any patch of grass for poisonous weeds and vipers' holes. When good grazing ground lay near rocks these must be searched lest they should harbour wild beasts, and the dens must be stopped up. "Thou hast prepared a table before me against them that afflict me": the sheep feed while their enemies are driven off or rendered harmless.

There was peril, also, on the actual path, hence the emphasis of "the paths of justice," and the reason why the shepherd "goeth before them," and why the sheep were trained to follow like dogs. The dog, of course, is not the friend of man in the East, he is regarded as unclean and a pariah; but sheep, cattle, and horses share man's life intimately. We see this again in Nathan's parable of the one ewe lamb, spoken to David, an ex-shepherd. This friendliness and dependence of the flock adds force to the Good Shepherd parables of Our Lord.

The path, then, held possible dangers: steep tracks along which sheep might stray and fall or

find it impossible to turn, dark passages between rocks where wild beasts lurked, rushing torrents (after the rains) which might sweep away an eager drinker. The continual allusions to water in the Bible tell of an arid land: "waters of refreshment," "waters that go softly," "the fountain of living water," idyllic pictures to a shepherd, whose watercourses being foaming torrents twice a year and at other times muddy trickles, must largely depend upon rain water caught in the spring and autumn and stored in cisterns.

The shepherd carried a club and crook besides his sling. The latter was a kind of catapult and with it he could throw a stone with great accuracy. This served the purpose both of a dog and a gun. He could turn a straying animal by a stone thrown beyond it, or drive away or kill preying beasts. At close quarters his "rod" or club came into play, as when David rescued a lamb from the very jaws of a marauding lion. The "staff" or crook is used for disciplining the sheep. By it an animal is dragged out of danger, directed in the way, pulled up for examination, etc. At the end of the day the shepherd brings his flock back to the fold and stands at the door so that each animal can only pass as he half turns himself to let it in: "the door of the

sheep." As the creature passes him the shepherd stops it with his crook and examines it carefully. He has a horn of oil and a flask of cedar tar. Any cuts he anoints with the latter, and he bathes the face of an exhausted animal with oil, and gives it a drink of water from his big two-handled cup, and ah! "how goodly it is." To the Eastern shepherd with his little flock every member of it is known individually and tended personally. In Browning's *Saul*, David thus describes the folding of his flock:

"And I first played the tune all our sheep know,
as, one after one,
"So docile they come to the pen-door till folding
be done.
"They are white and untorn by the bushes, for
lo, they have fed
"Where the long grasses stifle the water within
the stream's bed;
"And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star
follows star
"Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue
and so far!"

What light these details throw upon Our Blessed Lord's lovely parables. He is "the door," "He calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out . . . he goeth before them; and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. But a stranger they follow not . . . because

they know not the voice of strangers." The thief, climbing secretly over the wall, comes to kill and destroy ; the hireling flees when the wolf cometh, but " the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

Then there is that description of the treasured flock of a hundred sheep of which one is lost. One sheep is of little consequence on a big English farm, much less on a Colonial ranch. But this sheep was individually dear, and the owner searched among the perils of that rough mountain country until he found it. We love to remember that it was in this tender relationship of shepherd and sheep that " the great pastor of the sheep, Our Lord Jesus," constituted His Church. It was not a new picture of God's love and care for mankind ; on the contrary, it was a linking-up of the Old and the New Dispensations. It was to show that the Good Shepherd, so long expected, had now come in person to look after His flock and to set faithful servants over them.

" The sheep of thy pasture," the Psalmist terms mankind. " All we like sheep have gone astray," says Isaias ; and Ezechiel gives us a wonderful Good Shepherd parable. In chapter xxxiv. he tells how the Lord regards the rulers of the people as shepherds with their sheep, but these are neglectful shepherds, who take milk

and wool and food from the flock, but give it no care in return. "My flock you did not feed. The weak you have not strengthened, and that which was sick you have not healed; that which was broken you have not bound up, and that which was driven away you have not brought again, neither have you sought that which was lost . . . and my sheep were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and they became the prey of all the beasts of the field." For this grievous neglect of duty the false shepherds shall be punished: "I will require my flock at their hands, and I will cause them to cease from feeding the flock." But the flock shall not be left unfed. "For thus saith the Lord God, Behold I myself will seek my sheep . . . and will deliver them out of all the places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. . . . I will feed my sheep; and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God."

Then follows a warning to the sheep themselves, still given in the simple, striking language of the country-side. The flock has been recovered and folded in a fair pasture, the stray-aways found, the injured bound up, the weak cared for, the strong well tended, but the sheep have a duty to each other: "Behold I judge between cattle and cattle." There must be no

fighting, no selfishness : " Was it not enough for you to feed upon good pastures, but you must also tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures, and when you drank the clearest water you troubled the rest with your feet." It is a vivid picture of animal life, the weakest goes to the wall, the feebler must take the leavings. " You thrusted with sides and with shoulders, and struck all the weak cattle with your horns, till they were scattered abroad." That condition of things was natural in a wild state, but now they are to be one flock under one shepherd, " even my servant David : he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God : and my servant David the prince in the midst of them. . . . And you my flocks, the flocks of my pasture are men : and I am the Lord your God, saith the Lord God."

This exquisite parable fell like the very balm of Gilead upon the ears of those to whom it was spoken, the exiles in Babylon, those piteous sheep scattered abroad and thrust with side and with shoulder ; strayed, faithless sheep, yet longing now again to be folded safely under Jehovah's care. And we see from this how the study of the Old Testament lends depth and meaning to our reading of the Gospels, when we reflect that this parable of Ezechiel was well known to those who

heard our Blessed Lord describe Himself as the Good Shepherd. He was quietly telling them that He was the Messiah, the expected David, " the prince in the midst of them." In the gentlest way, best calculated to reveal the stupendous fact with the least shock, He was making Himself known as Jehovah, the God of Israel.

How fitting it was that to shepherds, " Keeping the night-watches over their flock," the tidings of great joy should come, that they should be the first to hear of the birth of the Shepherd of Israel. It is noteworthy that we have this mention of the shepherds and the parable of the Good Shepherd from the same pen, that of " Luke, the most dear physician," and from him alone. St. Luke, the tender-hearted, delighted to record all miracles of healing, all parables of mercy ; and, artist as tradition calls him, poet as his Gospel shows him, he noted the special significance of this annunciation. To men living David's life in David's countryside is announced the coming of the Son of David, who " shall feed his flock like a shepherd ; he shall gather together the lambs with his arm, and shall take them up in his bosom."

But not Shepherd only ; " when he cometh into the world, he saith : Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not : but a body thou hast fitted to

me. . . . Then said I: Behold I come. . . . That I should do thy will, O God." Across the fields of Bethlehem lies the shadow of Calvary. Already we note the poignant contrast between the folded flock and the homeless Babe.

XII

EZECHIEL: THE PROPHET OF THE EXILE

THE persistent idolatry of the Hebrew people made the Exile inevitable. The attraction of idolatry would seem to be found in man's two-fold nature; we are at once material and spiritual. As Francis Thompson puts it:

> "Man! swinging-wicket set
> "Between
> "The Unseen and Seen."

With one side of our nature we crave to know by means of our senses, with the other side we can reach out to that which is beyond sense. This is incomparably the finer and surer means of knowledge, but it needs cultivating. The man ruled only by his senses is merely aware of the sights and sounds around him; the spiritual man is as one with the wireless receiver at his ear. God's purpose for the Hebrews was that they should receive and act on these "wireless" messages in such a way that other nations might

realize the existence of the spiritual world, instead of which they continually followed the example of the heathen around them. The Exile was a drastic remedy, a sifting; only the gold would stand the fire.

First Samaria, then Jerusalem, were utterly destroyed and the entire Hebrew people, except a few of the poorest and lowest, were deported by their enemies to the wide plains watered by the Tigris and Euphrates. The men of Israel, under the Assyrians, were scattered abroad and so completely lost that traces of them have never more been found. The people of Juda, under the Babylonians, settled into colonies and held together. They had not entirely lost their loyalty to Jehovah and He would not forsake them. Far from it. Every detail of the Exile shows a divinely planned schooling of God's erring but chosen people.

To begin with, the Judean captivity was in two parts. While Jerusalem still stood, King Joakim and several thousand with him were taken to Babylon. They had thus time to establish themselves before the second and complete deportation. Further, they were accompanied by a holy servant of God, Ezechiel, a priest, a mystic, and a seer.

The people with whom Ezechiel was carried

away formed a colony at Tel-abib on the Chobar, or Grand Canal, which runs through Nippur, south-east of Babylon. There still remains a canal 120 feet wide in that locality. The country in which the exiles found themselves would make their lost land doubly dear by force of contrast. The district consisted of wide plains watered by great rivers and canals ; there were no woods or mountains, but here and there a few trees or rocks bordered the river banks. Babylon itself was the greatest and most magnificent city in the world of that day, perhaps of any day. Nebuchadnezzar had at this time just rebuilt much of it and further adorned it. Bricks bearing his name are still found. There was a wonderful temple to the sun-god Marduk, and the terraced gardens were very remarkable. The Hebrews were at last in the very heart of nature and idol worship, and as a consequence the more spiritual of them turned to the faith of their fathers and sought God, not in outward symbol, but in their own hearts. Among these people Ezechiel held what may be called the first pastorate or cure of souls.

His call came in this way : he was by the Chobar one day when a marvellous vision appeared to him, a vision of God's glory which could not be described in human language, so he

was obliged to describe it symbolically. Ezechiel fell into a kind of trance and saw a glowing storm cloud which resolved itself into a sort of chariot made by four living creatures forming a square. A human face looked outwards, with a lion on the right, an ox on the left, and an eagle at the back of the square. Each creature had four wings, the tips of one pair joining those of the next creatures, the other pair covering their bodies, and beneath the wings human hands. They had straight, jointless limbs and feet like the hooves of a calf. The whole group glowed with flame and moved like lightning, in any direction. Four vast wheels, with the rims of them full of eyes, accompanied the chariot, and it made a majestic rushing sound as it moved, like the noise of many waters. Above the chariot was "the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of the sapphire-stone, and upon the likeness of the throne, was a likeness as of the appearance of a man upon it. . . . As the appearance of the rainbow when it is a cloud on a rainy day : this was the appearance of the brightness round about."

The striking Assyrian sculptures with their man-headed lions and eagle-headed men must have made a deep impression on Ezechiel's mind, and he would have seen in this strange deification of the forces of nature an attempt to solve

the mystery of the relationship between Creator and creature. This vision of his was an interpretation of the age-old problem. It showed God throned upon the forces of nature. The chariot symbolized the natural world: man, domestic animals, wild beasts, birds, the constellations, fire, water. We note that Ezechiel is careful to describe the throne and Him who sat thereon in most guarded language: "the *likeness* of a throne," "a likeness as of the appearance of a man." He knew that the Holy One Himself could not be seen by mortal eyes.

"This was the vision of the likeness of the glory of the Lord," Ezechiel tells us. "And I saw, and I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of one that spoke to me, and he set me upon my feet: and I heard him speaking to me and saying: Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious people. . . and thou shalt speak my words to them, if perhaps they will hear and forbear."

A little later Ezechiel was told that he was to be "a watchman" to the people and that God would hold him responsible for their souls. Ezechiel's teaching falls into three divisions. At first he was told to urge the people to repentance and to predict the fall of Jerusalem as a consequence of their sins. He had to make use

of symbolic actions in order to get attention. Architectural plans were then drawn on tiles, the usual writing material. Ezechiel had to draw the plan of Jerusalem on a tile and then enact a mimic siege.

About a year after this some of the elders of the Jewish colony were visiting Ezechiel when he fell into a trance and was carried in spirit to Jerusalem and shown what was happening there. When he came out of his trance he told them what he had seen and that sight was sufficient to explain the coming destruction of the city. The Temple was arranged like a heathen place of worship. The " idol of jealousy " at the north gate would probably be the Babylonian dragon of chaos. Seventy of the elders were secretly engaged in heathen animal worship; the women were keeping the pagan custom known as mourning for Tammuz or Adonis, a nature rite symbolizing the destruction of the spring vegetation by the heat of summer. Worse still, some five and twenty men stood to worship the rising sun with their backs to the Temple of the Lord and the glory of the Lord, which the prophet saw so near to them and of which they were unconscious.

About three years later the siege of Jerusalem began. Ezechiel was commanded to announce

it by a parable of a pot which was allowed to stand empty on the fire in order to burn away its rust; and then came one of those terrible commands which ensured that none but heroes should be prophets: "Son of man, behold I take from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: and thou shalt not lament nor weep . . . sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead. . . . So I spoke to the people in the morning, and my wife died in the evening." When the people asked what his seeming insensibility meant he told them that it symbolized the stupor which would fall on them when they heard of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Ezechiel's prestige as a prophet was established by the fulfilment of this prophecy, and now followed a series of other prophecies which were doubtless very welcome to his hearers. He depicted the destruction of Tyre as the wreck of a gallant ship, and the fall of their old enemy Egypt as the crashing down of a cedar. At first the prophet's task had been to preach repentance, then he had to show God's punishment for sin, at length he had the happiness of describing the restoration of Israel and the establishment of the kingdom of God: "I the Lord will be their God: and my servant David the prince in the midst of them. . . . For I will take you from

among the gentiles, and I will gather you together out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. . . . And I will make a covenant of peace with them . . . and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for ever . . . and I will be their God and they shall be my people."

Ezechiel clearly realized the value of the Exile as a training for the people, and it was doubtless due to him that devotion presently flourished among the more zealous of them. It became customary to meet on the banks of rivers or canals for prayer and the ceremonial purifications which the law required. Presently fixed forms of prayer came into use and meeting houses were built. This was the origin of the synagogue. Further, the people now learnt to value their ancient Scriptures as never before, and these were studied and collected and edited and greatly treasured. Later on it became the custom to read the Law as a part of the Sabbath ceremonial. All Jewish customs which could be followed apart from the Temple service were now observed very carefully, such as circumcision, fasting, distinction of food, and keeping the Sabbath holy. These observances continued throughout the Exile and doubtless Ezechiel had a great deal to do with the formation of this regular worship

and observance of religious duties, for his mind was full of plans for an ideal community whose centre of worship should be a new Temple. In the last part of his book, written in the fourteenth year after the fall of Jerusalem, he describes a glorious vision of this new Temple to which he sees God return. It is, as it were, a recompense for that other heart-breaking vision of the desecrated sanctuary.

Ezechiel's writings have had a great influence on the history of his country and on the other sacred writers. His description of the ideal community would form a standard for the Jews on their return from exile. The symbols used for the evangelists were probably derived from his first vision, with which we may compare the "living creatures" in the Apocalypse.

XIII

DANIEL AND HIS TIMES

THE courtyard was slashed with sharp patterns of gold and black where the noon-day sun blazed down on the fine yellow bricks or the walls cast heavy shadows. Great winged bulls with majestic, bearded human heads, guarded the gates. If you passed through them you might go down the wide streets to the banks of the mighty Euphrates, palm-fringed, ship-laden, or, if you turned towards the sounds of hammer-stroke and song, you would find innumerable workmen rearing some immense building. But that group of lads in the shade of the wall are not free to come and go, for this is Babylon, early in the reign of Nabuchodonosor, and the war with Juda has resulted in much spoil and many captives.

The Hebrew youths stood or lay in little groups. Some seemed listless and depressed, but others were discussing their new circumstances with a certain eager interest. Babylon was indeed a wonderful place. Men said that it was built before the Flood, and that now Nabuchodonosor

meant to make it the most beautiful city in the world, far finer than any city of Egypt. Look at that great temple he is building; and what will the hanging gardens they tell of be like when finished? Surely a wonder of terraced bloom. Men say, too, that the king looks kindly on Hebrews, likes them about his court, and Asphenez, the official in charge of the youths, has hinted that some may be selected for special training with a view to court appointments. Well, a man could make his way in the world like that; and after all Hebrew and Chaldean come originally from the same stock.

Four grave, handsome lads stood by themselves and took no part in this discussion. They were talking quietly together.

"The God of our fathers will surely be with us," said one who seemed to be the leader of the little party. "The world is His, not only the land of Juda as some think. If we are faithful to His laws He will still count us among His servants, even though we can no longer offer sacrifices in His holy temple. Our very names should encourage us. Yours, Ananias, 'Jehovah is gracious'; and yours, Misael, 'Who is what God is?'; Azarias, too, 'Jehovah has helped'; and my own which is both a strength and a warning, 'God is Judge.'"

"It is well spoken, Daniel," said Azarias, "and perchance the time has even now come for our principles to be put to the test."

There was a stir and movement of attention among all the lads as a Chaldean official with his attendants entered the court and came towards them.

"Hebrew youths," he said, "attend. The great king Nabuchodonosor, lord of the whole earth, has graciously commanded that certain lads from among you shall be educated for the royal service. Therefore those whom I shall now select will be set apart and given daily provision of meat and wine from the king's table that they may grow comely and strong, and learned men shall instruct them in all knowledge that they may become wise. Thus, after the space of three years, they may be ready to stand before the king."

Asphenez then moved among the youths, selecting the better favoured and the more intelligent of them. Among those chosen were Daniel and his three friends. To them, as to others, he gave Babylonian names. A gesture indicated each in turn: "Baltassar, Sidrach, Misach, Abdenago. Remember you are Chaldeans now," he warned them, "and your new names shall bring to your minds the great Bel,

Aku the moon-good, and Neb whose mighty temple is a-building yonder."

When they were alone again the four lads discussed their position. Names did not matter. A Jew, they would have said, by any other name can be as faithful. Learning was to be welcomed; was not the Lord a God of knowledge? But the food and wine from the king's table . . . almost certainly a part of it would have been offered to idols; the flesh might be that of unclean beast or bird, and who could tell whether it were not served with the blood of which no son of the Covenant might eat? They must refuse this food.

Daniel, as spokesman, went to Asphenez, who had always shown him favour, and asked that he and his friends might not be given this special fare. The official replied frankly that he dared not grant this request. If they were less well nourished than the other youths it might cost him his head. Then Daniel went to Malasar, who had immediate charge of them, and suggested that he should try an experiment. Would he give him and his friends plain food, bread and vegetables and water, for ten days, and at the end of that period note which looked the better, those fed on the rich food or those fed on the plain. Malasar was quite willing. Ten days

would do no harm and he himself could make use of the royal dainties. At the end of the time the four abstemious youths were quite evidently in better condition than the others, and so they were allowed their wholesome diet throughout the years of training, and Malasar, well pleased, "took their portions."

The child, we are told, is the father of the man; and certainly Daniel's after-life fulfilled the promise of his youth. There are points about this magnificent steadfastness and temperance which show his remarkable character. He was just at the age when the normal boy often seems little more than a splendid young animal, when nature prompts him to take any good thing which life may offer and when he is, frequently, greedy and unashamed. There was no public opinion to affect these lads, and the principles which weighed with them were such as might well influence a trained theologian or a devout ascetic, but not, one would suppose, boys in the first flush of youth. This incident strikes the keynote of Daniel's whole life. The many arresting incidents of that life are, of course, delightfully familiar to everyone, vividly dramatic in their barbaric setting of glittering Eastern courts; Daniel's dignified sanctity is thrown into higher relief by the fierce futility of a Nabuchodonosor,

the reckless paganism of a Balthazzar, or the childish impetuosity of a Darius.

The book which gives us these striking pictures is one of the most fascinating pieces of literature and perhaps one of the most quoted. Even in his own days Daniel seems to have become a proverb, for Ezechiel refers to him as a typical wise and righteous man. Our Blessed Lord quotes both directly and indirectly from this book. When foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans He speaks of "the abomination of desolation which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet," and in His stories and parables He uses more than once pictures and descriptions found in Daniel's prophecies, for He was speaking to people who knew them well. The Apocalypse of St. John contains similar allusions; and down through the ages both religious and secular literature quotes from this book. "The Song of the Three Children" in chapter iii. is the liturgical thanksgiving after mass and the canticle in Sunday lauds.

Perhaps one of the fascinations of the book of Daniel lies in its mysterious character. All sorts of problems about it have exercised the minds of scholars from the time of St. Jerome downwards. For one thing, it is written in three languages, Hebrew, Chaldaic, and Greek, all mixed up

together. Then the prophecies are so grand and mysterious that, outside the Church, they have given rise to all sorts of speculations, and queer heresies have even been founded on them. It is, then, noteworthy, that it is not the vivid stories on which the Church lays special emphasis when handing us this book, but the prophecies. "The Prophecy of Daniel" the book is called, as if to hint gently that there is much in it which we can not expect to understand fully.

Daniel's temperate life and fine mental training made him a splendid instrument for God's service, and it was not long before his supernatural gift for wisdom was revealed to those around him. Nabuchodonosor dreamt a dream which left a deep impression on his waking mind and he wished to know its interpretation, but he could not remember the details. He commanded his wise men to tell him both the dream and its meaning. Those unfortunate persons protested in vain that this was quite beyond them. When Daniel heard of the difficulty he asked for time to consider the matter, and in response to prayer God revealed to him both the dream and its interpretation. The king had seen a great image with a head of gold, half the body of silver and half of brass, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay. A stone fell on the feet and broke them and the

image crumbled. The stone became a mountain which filled the earth. This, Daniel explained, symbolized Nabuchodonosor's kingdom and the three world-powers which should succeed it. In the days of the last of these God would set up a universal and lasting kingdom.

Again, Nabuchodonosor dreamt of a great tree which "reached unto heaven . . . under it dwelt cattle and beasts, and in the branches thereof the fowls of the air had their abode." He saw "a watcher and a holy one" come down from heaven and order the tree to be felled, leaving only the stump. "And let its portion be with the wild beasts in the grass of the earth." Nabuchodonosor had long been almost insane with pride, as his boastful inscriptions show, and the prophet told him that this was a warning to him. He should be cast out of his kingdom and become as a beast of the field till he had learnt to acknowledge the power of the Most High. The Monarch's seven years of madness which ensued, and which he gratefully admitted brought him to his senses, was a mental affliction known as lycanthropy, whereby a man believes himself to be some sort of beast and acts accordingly. This is thought to be the origin of the "werewolf" legends. In Nabuchodonosor's excited and highly suggestible state Daniel's solemn

prophecy would easily produce such a condition.

Presently we get another vivid picture. Nabuchodonosor is dead. Balthazzar reigns. At a drunken orgy he uses the gold and silver vessels from the temple at Jerusalem as wine cups. Suddenly he sees the fingers of a hand writing on the wall. The hand fades away but the writing remains. Balthazzar is paralysed with fear. Nobody can interpret the writing. Then the queen recalls Daniel's reputation and the prophet is sent for. The mystic words, Mane, Thecel, Phares, are the name of weights. Daniel tells him that he is "weighed in the balance" and "found wanting." He was indeed worthless and his dynasty was exhausted. That very night Babylon fell without a blow to the Medo-Persian troops. Balthazzar was slain.

The book of Daniel contains that wonderful vision of "the Ancient of days" whose "garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like clean wool," who judged the earth and to whom came "one like the Son of man" to receive his kingdom. That strangely beautiful title "the Ancient of days" is peculiar to Daniel. It is a marvellous expression of the enduring omnipotence, the sure faithfulness, the eternal fatherhood of the Almighty.

XIV

THE RETURN FROM EXILE

THE Babylonian exile very effectually sifted the good from the bad in the Jewish people. Those who craved for idol worship might revert to paganism, those who hungered for material prosperity had every worldly advantage. Many took a prominent part in affairs of State, many engaged in commerce. A clay tablet of the fifth century B.C., gives the archives of a great commercial house, Murashi and Sons, and there are many Jewish names in the documents.

But there were certain among the Jews for whom the purgation of the Exile was not in vain. Their hearts were in that little mountain country which Jehovah had given to their fathers, their hearts' desire was to return thither and re-build the Temple and restore the daily sacrifice. This hope was kept alive among the exiles by Jeremias' prophecies and Ezechiel's preaching. About twenty years after Ezechiel's death the way seemed about to open.

Cyrus, Prince of Anshan, had made himself

master of Media and Persia and was advancing on Babylon. His name was one to awaken fervent hope. Had not Isaias proclaimed: "I am the Lord that make all things . . . who say to Jerusalem: Thou shalt be inhabited: and to the cities of Juda: You shall be built. . . . Who say to Cyrus: Thou art my shepherd, and thou shalt perform all my pleasure . . . and to the temple: Thy foundations shall be laid. Thus saith the Lord to my anointed Cyrus, whose right hand I have taken hold of, to subdue nations before his face."

The Assyrian dynasty was exhausted, and Babylonians were as ready as Jews to welcome the conqueror. They seemed to regard him as sent by the gods. In one of their myths their gods Ishtar and Bel are said to "look round for a shepherd in heaven and for a king upon earth." Nabonidus, whom Cyrus deposed, had given great offence by removing to his capital the gods of various cities. Cyrus, a truly religious man, respected the religion of others and restored these "captive" gods. Not only did he carefully preserve the temple of the Babylonian Marduk, but he put himself under that god's protection, as we see from the inscription on his cylinder. He describes the misery of the Babylonians before his coming and then says "Marduk took

pity. He looked round throughout all the lands, considered them, and sought a righteous king after his own heart, to take by the hand. He called Cyrus king of Anshan by his name, to rule over the whole universe."

Josephus says that Cyrus was so struck with Isaias' prophecy about himself some 140 years before his time that he decided to let the Jews return. He evidently felt himself to be the servant of the Supreme Being and perhaps believed that Jehovah and Marduk were but different names for one God. In the first year of his reign in Babylon he issued the following decree: "The Lord the God of heaven hath given to me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem . . . who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him. Let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judea, and build the house of the Lord the God of Israel." Those who could not go up were to help by gifts. Cyrus' own contribution was the vessels of the Temple which Nabuchodonosor had taken from Jerusalem.

Over forty thousand Jews availed themselves of Cyrus' permission to return to Judea, which now became a Persian province. The immigrants probably included members of all the tribes and families, so that it was really the return of a

nation. They were under the direction of twelve elders headed by Zorobabel and the priest Josue. Zorobabel was of the lineage of David. He was made governor of the province.

Very courageous hearts were needed by these returning Jews. There was none of the thrill of conquest, none of the joy of adventure, no hopeful sense of glorious possibilities in store such as animates the colonist of a new world. It was a return to a land laid waste, a land needing much labour to make it fertile, and this was the harder in as much as the immigrants had left behind them a prosperous country. Their sole inspiration was a spiritual ideal, not an easy thing to live up to amidst material hardships.

For the first few months the people were engaged in building houses for themselves round about Jerusalem. Then, in the autumn, they assembled together and re-built the great altar of burnt-offering on its ancient site, and the daily sacrifice was restored. In the second year of the Return matters were far enough advanced for the foundation stones of the new Temple to be laid. That was a great day.

Zorobabel the governor and Josue the priest summoned all the people together, with the priests and the Levites. " And when the masons laid the foundations of the temple of the Lord, the priests

stood in their ornaments with trumpets : and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals . . . and they sang together hymns and praise to the Lord . . . and all the people shouted with a great shout praising the Lord, because the foundations of the temple of the Lord were laid. But many of the priests and the Levites, and the chief of the fathers and the ancients that had seen the former temple : when they had the foundation of this temple before their eyes, wept with a loud voice : and many shouting for joy, lifted up their voice. So that one could not distinguish the voice of the shout of joy, for the noise of the weeping of the people." It was indeed a poignant moment of mingled joy and sorrow.

Surely now they could make rapid progress, for to begin well is half the battle. But human nature was the same then as now, and political and sectarian jealousy just as virulent. Some of us may have been puzzled by that enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans so evident in the time of Our Lord, which leads the woman at the well to exclaim in astonishment when she saw that Christ was friendly towards her, and implies that a " good Samaritan " was an anomaly, like a white crow. The origin of that enmity is found here in 1 Esdras iv.

When Samaria was taken by Sargon in 722 B.C.,

the inhabitants were deported and Assyrian colonists planted there. Esarhaddon and Assur-bani-pal sent further immigrants, and these people now formed a hybrid population in conjunction with those Israelites who had been left in the land. A priest had been sent from the Captivity to teach them the religion of Israel, but " they made to themselves, of the lowest of the people, priests of the high places . . . and when they worshipped the Lord, they served also their own gods according to the custom of the nations out of which they were brought to Samaria."

But these half-caste people felt that they were just as good Israelites as the returned Jews, and they desired to share in the re-building of the Temple and full religious privileges. So they offered their help. The Jewish leaders recognized the danger. The introduction of corrupt customs would undo all the good which the Exile had accomplished, pagan cults would again sully the worship of Jehovah. At all costs religion must be maintained in its hard-won purity. The Jews made the excuse that Cyrus' permission was for themselves alone, and the offer of " the people of the land " was firmly refused. Therefore these latter became open enemies and hindered the work by every means in their power. As a result the building was stopped for about sixteen years,

and they were years of famine and scarcity, as well as of oppression by these hostile tribes, so that it is no wonder that the Jews sank into a condition of apathy and despondency. From this they were aroused by two prophets, Aggeus and Zacharias, in the second year of Darius the Great. (1 Esdras iv. 8–23 is a later document here inserted as the complement of verses 6 and 7.)

It is thought that Aggeus may have been a very old man who remembered the former Temple. His book certainly seems to contain wisdom such as is garnered in a ripe old age : The people were suffering from poverty and ill-fortune, but they were not going the right way to better themselves. They could " dwell in ceiled houses," but they left the house of the Lord desolate. To neglect their duty to God and strive only for themselves was to work hard and put the resultant wage into " a bag with holes." Were they discouraged because they could never build a Temple to equal the glory of the former one ? Let them take heart, for " the Desired of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts."

Within a month of Aggeus' call to action they had resumed work on the Temple foundations. Then Zacharias, a young priest whose name means " the Lord remembers," encouraged the people

with a series of symbolic visions and prophecies dealing with the Messiah and His kingdom.

The building operations attracted the notice of the Persian governor. The Jews stated that they were authorized by Cyrus, so the governor sent to Persia to get this statement verified. Darius ordered the records to be searched and Cyrus' actual decree was found. Darius re-inforced this decree and ordered the Persian officials to assist the Jews in every way. The Temple was completed in about four years, and was dedicated with solemn sacrifices. If it was built to the measurements suggested by Cyrus it was larger than Solomon's Temple, but was of course less splendid in every way. Like the former building, it consisted of a Holy of Holies and a Holy Place, before each of which hung a veil, but the Holy of Holies was now empty for the ark was lost. In the Holy Place was the golden altar of incense, the candlestick, the table of shewbread and various vessels. In one of the courts was the altar of burnt-offering, and round the Temple building were rooms for the priests and for storehouses.

The monarchy was no more and the national leader was the High Priest, a title now apparently used for the first time. He was the head of the Temple organization, which consisted of the priests, the Levites, and the Temple servants or

Nethinim, a word which means "given," *i.e.*, slaves of the priests.

Thus the Temple was re-built and the priesthood re-founded, but the walls of Jerusalem were still in ruins and we know nothing of the fortunes of the nation for the next sixty years.

XV

THE WORK OF ESDRAS AND NEHEMIAS

BURNING summer days and star-bright nights. Over the hot sands, from oasis to oasis, a large caravan makes its way, travelling along that ancient route, the high-road between Babylonia and Syria. It is evidently a wealthy party, of some 1,600 men with their many baggage animals. The leader is a thin, scholarly priest, with the shining eyes of an enthusiast. There are quite a number of priests in his train. It is the year 458 B.C., and in August these Persian Jews reach the ruined city of Jerusalem. They have come to bring help to their poor and dispirited kinsmen.

The first party of immigrants, despatched by Cyrus (King of Persia and conqueror of Babylon), had been now established in Jerusalem for seventy years. They had rebuilt the temple, poor and mean though it seemed in comparison with former glory. The walls of the city, however, were still in ruins.

The most terrible of all despairs was upon the

people: "He laboureth in vain that serveth God," they said, "and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances . . . they that work wickedness are built up." They were too depressed to heed the prophet Micheas' triumphant promise: "Unto you that fear my name the Sun of justice shall arise, and health in his wings." There was poverty and misery and religious indifference, and the Jews freely inter-married with the semi-pagan folk around them. They had lost pride in themselves as Jehovah's peculiar people. At this rate they would soon lose their national identity.

Meanwhile the Jews in Babylon had prospered under the Persian kings. They treasured and studied their Hebrew Scriptures, and had a very complete system of law, theology, and worship. Jerusalem with its temple was still their traditional holy place, but it was much more comfortable to live in Babylonia. From time to time, however, disquieting news reached them from "the province," and there was one man who could not hear and lightly forget. This was the devout and learned priest Esdras. He had made the Law of Moses his special study, and it troubled him greatly to know that his countrymen were disregarding that law. He asked permission to conduct a body of settlers to Jerusalem, that he

might himself endeavour to restore religious enthusiasm and enforce the keeping of the law.

Artaxerxes I, the fifth king from Cyrus, was favourably disposed towards the Jews and at once gave his consent. Further, he commissioned Esdras to inquire into Judean affairs and ordered the Persian officials to assist him in every way. The decree ended with a remarkable injunction: "Appoint judges and magistrates that may judge all the people that is beyond the river, that is for them who know the law of thy God; yea, and the ignorant teach ye freely." The law of God and the "law of the king" were both to be enforced by severe punishments.

So Esdras and his party set forth, carrying with them rich gifts from the wealthy Jews of Babylonia, as well as from Artaxerxes himself. There was a small body of faithful Jews in Jerusalem and these welcomed him with joy. Esdras' intention was to reform the temple services and give instruction in the books of Moses. But before he could begin these reforms a crying evil needed attention. Many of the leading Jews, and even some of the priests, had married foreign wives. Esdras was horrified. "And when I had heard this word," he tells us, "I rent my mantle and my coat . . . and sat down mourning . . . and at the evening sacrifice I rose up from my

affliction, and . . . fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, and said: I am confounded and ashamed to lift up my eyes to thee." His long, impassioned prayer which followed made a deep impression on the assembled people who came together while he was "thus praying and beseeching and weeping." His own emotion stirred theirs and Esdras was quick to seize his opportunity. He made the people solemnly promise that the foreign wives should be put away.

This was easier said than done, however. Individuals refused to obey the edict, and a commission took three months to find out all who had married aliens. Both the women and their children were expelled, and this drastic action made many enemies for Esdras and his party. Just what happened next is not clear, but it is supposed that Esdras now set about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and this roused the opposition recorded in 1 Esdras iv. 8–23. Naturally, the "people of the land" would be doubly enraged when their daughters were divorced. Already, as we know, they had a standing grudge against the Jews for their refusal to accept any help in the building of the Temple. (Jewish instinct told them that religion and race must be kept pure until the coming of the Messiah, who alone had

power to admit the gentiles to his kingdom.) Esdras' enemies were too strong for him, the work on the walls was stopped, and all that had been built pulled down. For twelve years nothing more is heard of the gallant reformer. It is noteworthy, however, that he apparently remained in Jerusalem instead of seeking a more appreciative flock in Babylon.

Again and again in the history of the Chosen Race, God sends the man when the hour demands him. The condition of things in Juda was now far beyond the governing powers of a man of books. It needed a man of action. Esdras could inspire the few, he could not sway the herd. He was a saint and scholar, not an orator and soldier. But who shall say what those years of work and prayer accomplished for his land?

Away in Babylon there dwelt a very different type of man, such an one as our own Sir Thomas More, devout, wise, witty, and a born ruler. Nehemias was a favourite courtier of Artaxerxes, a man, clearly, in whose society the monarch took delight. But royal favour and court splendour never made Nehemias forget the God of Israel and the sacred city of Jerusalem. He learnt that the people of Juda were " in great affliction and reproach " and it troubled him deeply. He prayed earnestly for help and guidance. A bold thought

had entered his mind. It was his turn to act as cup-bearer. The king, indeed, was his very good master, but Persian monarchs were despots of the deepest dye, and the success of a request might depend upon the whim of a moment. Lives were doubtless forfeited in moments of irritation.

Nehemias duly performed his office and presented wine to Artaxerxes. The king noticed a great change in his appearance since he had last seen him. "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou dost not appear to be sick?" he asked solicitously. Nehemias tells us that he was "seized with an exceeding great fear," and we know that he was no coward. "And I said to the king, O King, live for ever: why should not my countenance be sorrowful, seeing the city of the place of the sepulchres of my fathers is desolate, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire?" The king inquired what his request might be, and, with a swift prayer for help, Nehemias asked permission to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. "For how long will thy journey be, and when wilt thou return?" was the anxious but gladly heard query of the royal friend.

So Nehemias was allowed to depart, armed with full powers as governor and accompanied by a bodyguard of Persian troops. He also carried letters of recommendation to the officials

en route. The Jews' special enemies, Sanaballat the Horonite and Tobias the Ammanite, were greatly enraged at the arrival of this official deputation. Nehemias ignored their bluster. First, he made a private reconnaisance of the city, riding round the broken walls at dead of night, accompanied only by a few trusty men. The ravine of the Kedron was so choked with rubbish that his mule could not pass.

He then called the people together and appealed to their patriotism. They responded, and the work began at once. Every able-bodied man assisted. The people were divided into parties, each under the direction of men of the leading families. They were in hourly danger of attack from Sanaballat, so Nehemias kept armed men on guard always, and the workers were armed. He himself watched ceaselessly and sounded the alarm in case of attack. The work was completed in fifty-two days, and during the whole time Nehemias and his servants never left their posts nor even removed their clothes.

As Sanaballat had failed to prevent the walls being built he next tried to kill Nehemias by strategy. He first sent an invitation to a conference with a view to alliance, but Nehemias knew that his " white flag " was not to be trusted and made that memorable treply : " I am doing a

great work and I cannot come down." They then tried blackmail, which Nehemias calmly ignored. Next an acquaintance warned him that his life was threatened, and advised him to escape. Nehemias knew his man. "I understood that God had not sent him . . . he had taken money," he shrewdly comments. To the traitor he made that dignified rejoinder: "Should such a man as I flee?"

When the walls were completed and the gates set up they were joyfully and solemnly dedicated, as described in 2 Esdras xii. 27 following. It was probably soon after this that the events of chapter viii. took place. Esdras' opportunity had arrived at last. He had the whole-hearted support of Nehemias, and he could now lay before the people the law of Moses in all its majesty and urge their acceptance of it as the basis of their national life. Jerusalem was again a fortified city and the people realized they were still the Chosen Race. The new evidence of Jehovah's care re-kindled zeal. They desired to hear the ancient, precious words. On the first day of the civil year a great multitude met "in the street that was before the watergate." Esdras stood aloft on a pulpit of wood and read the book aloud "from the morning until midday," apparently stopping now and again to explain passages (2 Esdras viii. 8).

The people were greatly stirred by this reading ; tears flowed fast as they recalled their past sins. But Nehemias told them to go home and keep the day as a joyful feast, " and be not sad, for the joy of the Lord is our strength." The reading was resumed next day, and directions were given out for keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. Throughout the week of the feast Esdras continued to read portions of the law. Two days later a fast was proclaimed and the people made a solemn national confession of sin. This was followed by a beautiful public recital of God's mercies to His people throughout their history. Then the covenant between Israel and Jehovah was formally renewed. This was signed and sealed by Nehemias and by representatives of priests and people.

These events laid the foundation-stone of Judaism. The nation had become a church. The Law, formerly known only to the priests, had become a people's book. It was the bond of union between the Jews of Juda and the " children of the captivity."

XVI

FROM NEHEMIAS TO ALEXANDER THE GREAT

IT is winter time. A pruned, leafless tree raises bare, hacked branches to the grey sky, a tree which has been lopped and cut back till little more than a stump is left; but all around it young suckers have sprung up from the parent root, and stem and shoots alike await the coming of spring. This is a picture of the Jewish nation in the years following the restoration of Judaism under Esdras and Nehemias.

As we know, God's purpose in separating the Hebrew people to be His chosen flock was that they might receive the truth of revelation and hold it until the coming of the Light of the World. Because their mission was world-wide they were given as their homeland a little country which lay in the centre of the world empires, alongside the high road of the nations. Through many trials the Jews had at last learnt to be faithful to Jehovah, and indeed the people now formed a Church rather than a nation. Their ruler was their high

priest, and they possessed only the city of Jerusalem and a small portion of the surrounding country. The mixed population of Palestine, descendants of Assyrian colonists and half-hearted or renegade Israelites, were their deadly enemies, and this racial enmity was now intensified by religious strife, for an heretical temple had been erected at Samaria on the Jews' refusal to let their semi-heathen neighbours share in their own reformed worship.

Judaea was now nothing but an insignificant province of the mighty Persian empire which stretched from the coasts of Asia Minor to the Indus. The Jews had no political power whatever. One might have expected that they would lose their racial identity and be absorbed by their powerful neighbours, so widely scattered and so powerless were they, but this strange people always remained apart like oil on water. Many of them served in the Persian armies, but they remained Jews. As traders, slaves, and prisoners of war they were scattered over the Persian empire and beyond its borders, but they remained Jews. There were large colonies of them in Babylon and Susa and Ecbatana, in Mesopotamia and Syria, in the seaports of Asia Minor and in the Egyptian Delta, but they never lost their nationality. The isolation of the parent root and

the widespread dispersion of the young settlements were means to the Divine end. The Jews of Judaea became more exclusive than ever, and the minds of their best men were concentrated on the Law which now grew to be a precious and living thing to the whole people. It was the link which bound the colonists to the mother country. Mount Sion was the spot to which all turned their eyes. The Jews of the Dispersion came up to Jerusalem whenever possible, and they brought with them knowledge of the world at large. Gradually the commercial language of Asia, Aramaic, became the usual language of the Jews, and their own difficult, stately Hebrew was reserved for theology alone and presently was known only to the learned. Here we have the first stage in the world-wide mission of the Chosen Race: as a people they could speak the common language and were citizens of the world.

We know very little about the history of the Jews of Judaea during the hundred years following the death of Nehemias, though the book of Esther gives us a picture of Jewish life in Persian cities. Judaea was governed by a line of hereditary high priests who lived at Jerusalem and were assisted by a kind of municipal council consisting of elders and priests of the higher rank.

Little is known of these rulers beyond their names. Eliasib was high priest in Nehemias' time, his successors were Joiada, Johanan and Jaddua. Unhappily the power which went with the high priestly office made it an object of ambition and intrigue. Josephus relates a shocking example of this. Johanan, who succeeded his father Joiada, discovered that his brother Joshua desired the high priesthood for himself and was plotting with the Persian officials in order to secure their protection and support, whereupon the high priest actually murdered him within the precincts of the temple itself. The Persian officer, Bagoses, who was in sympathy with the murdered man, made this a pretext for polluting the temple and levying a heavy fine on the Jews.

The Persian empire was weakening now and the subject races started little revolutions here and there. True to their history, the Jews were not behindhand in taking part in these. In 358 B.C. there was a widespread revolt in Syria and Egypt against Artaxerxes III Ochus. It lasted about two years and then was crushed out. Judaea came in for due punishment, the country was invaded and ravaged, and a party of Jews was carried captive to Babylonia and some were even transported to the shores of the Caspian Sea. Throughout their history the Jews were

never able to live peacefully for long when foreigners ruled their land. Apart from this unfortunate incident the Jews prospered under the Persians. They suffered inconveniences such as official oppression and the troublesome incursion of Persian troops marching through Palestine on their way to Egypt, but they enjoyed a good deal of freedom and were able to organize their religious observances on the lines of Esdras' reformation. In place of the prophets of old the people had their priests and scribes, who studied and expounded the Law, and moral philosophers such as the authors of the *Wisdom* books in the Bible. The temple and its services gradually increased in splendour. Every Israelite aged twenty and upwards paid a poll-tax for the maintenance of its sacrifices, and the Jews of the Dispersion sent representatives to Jerusalem so that it was the centre of worship for the whole nation.

Meanwhile the huge Persian empire was decaying. Her armies had met their match in the Greeks and had suffered severe defeats at Marathon and Salamis. A new world-power was dawning, an event fraught with far-reaching consequences for the people of God. The time was drawing near when the stem of Juda should burst into blossom and the good tidings of great joy which should be for all people would need to be conveyed to

mankind at large in a language of surpassing delicacy and flexibility. The uncouth and difficult Asiatic tongues could never supply this need. It must be a language which would last throughout the ages, one capable of expressing the finest shades of feeling and the deepest and grandest truths. There was such a language already in the world: Greek, the tongue of poets and philosophers; but how should the culture of Greece reach the tiny isolated province of Judaea and become the language of the Christian world?

To see the Persian army setting forth to war would be to fancy it invincible. The historians of antiquity have given us a picture of it. First, they carried silver altars on which burned the sacred fire, for they were Zoroastrians, worshipping the sun. Next came Magi, singing hymns, then followed three hundred and sixty-five youths, clad in purple, representing the days of the year. Then came the chariot of Jupiter drawn by white horses and followed by a mighty charger called the Horse of the Sun. Afterwards came innumerable gorgeous chariots, the king and queen and court and nobles, a vast array of splendour, confident in the power of their immense armies and making of war the pageant of a tourney.

Compare this cumbrous magnificence with a

simple scene taking place beyond the Mediterranean. A group of men were standing on a wide plain. Philip of Macedon, the conqueror of Greece, " lover of horses " as his name denoted, had come out to try a fine war-horse sent from Thessaly for his inspection. A war-horse then meant what troop-train and tank and armoured car means to-day. Your mobility and your life depended on your steed. Philip's son, young Alexander, was with him, and a group of courtiers. The horse was magnificent, a great fiery beast, but he proved quite unmanageable. He plunged so desperately that no one dared mount him, and Philip lost his temper and demanded why they had wasted his time in calling him to look at such a brute. " Take him away," he ordered angrily. Then young Alexander stepped forward. " What a noble horse they are going to lose for want of address and boldness to back him," he said, and begged to be allowed to try his hand. Philip at first refused, he thought this mere youthful brag. But at length the boy got his way. He had been observing the horse carefully and noticed that he was afraid of his shadow. He now went up to the animal, took the bridle, and turned his head facing the sun so that his shadow fell behind him. Then he patted and soothed the fretted creature, and when he had quieted down

sufficiently, leaped on his back, gave him his head, and cantered him quietly till he felt that he had complete control. Then he spurred him to full speed and rode him to a standstill, returning to his amazed parent and the gasping courtiers on a foam-flecked, mastered horse, his faithful servant and friend while its life should last. Philip shed tears of joy at this princely feat and exlaimed: "My son, seek a kingdom more worthy of thee, for Macedon is below thy merit."

When Alexander rode Bucephalus at the sun he was, all unconsciously, riding a tilt with the Horse of the Sun, he was clearing a path for the rising of the Sun of Justice. This young prince, who slept with a copy of Homer beneath his pillow and whose tutor was none other than Aristotle, was the new world conqueror, and his conquests meant the coming of Greek culture into Asia and the language of the future New Testament permeating Palestine in readiness for its glorious task; while Aristotle's profound thought and exact expression was to form at last the foundation of Catholic philosophy in the hands of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Alexander succeeded his father at the age of twenty, and at once began his amazing and victorious world war. He defeated the Persians at Granicus and Issus and then entered Syria and

Palestine. After a prolonged siege Tyre fell, and then he marched on Jerusalem. Josephus gives many picturesque details of these events, and though he is not always a very exact historian, yet it is an undoubted fact that Alexander was very friendly towards the Jews. The story goes that, during the siege of Tyre, Alexander sent to Jerusalem and demanded its submission, together with supplies for his army. The Jews answered that they had taken an oath of allegiance to Darius and refused to comply. Alexander therefore marched wrathfully upon Jerusalem. Jaddua, the high priest, sought help from God, and was told in a dream to go out to meet the conqueror, clothed in his pontifical robes, accompanied by priests and people, while the gates of the city should be set open and flowers strewn in the streets. The Samaritans had sent troops to Alexander and they now hoped to see Jerusalem annihilated, but, to the amazement of all, when Alexander and Jaddua met, the king greeted the high priest with deep reverence and accompanied him into the city and even to the temple. He explained that he had seen one like Jaddua in a vision and knew him for a servant of God. The high priest then showed Alexander the passages in the book of Daniel which relate to him and his conquests.

The conqueror next marched on Egypt and

subjugated that ancient empire, in token whereof he built a proud city on one of the branches of the Nile and named it Alexandria. He invited a body of Jews to settle there and allowed them special privileges. These colonists soon became the most wealthy and cultured of their race, and at the opening of the Christian era they are said to have numbered a million. It was in this city that the famous Greek translation of the Old Testament was made, the Septuagint, so called because tradition says that seventy-two learned Jews were sent from Jerusalem to Alexandria for this purpose. Thus, thanks indirectly to Alexander, before the birth of Christ the Jewish Bible had been translated into the beautiful language which was to be the form in which the New Testament should be given to the world, and which is still the language in which scholars study that sacred text.

After Alexander's death in 323 B.C. his empire was divided among his generals, who are usually spoken of as the *Diadochi* or successors. At first there was a period of fierce fighting, and then two new kingdoms emerged: Egypt under the Ptolemies and Syria under the Seleucidae, and once again, as throughout her history, Palestine lay between two antagonistic empires.

XVII

JUDAEA UNDER EGYPT AND SYRIA

PECULIARLY interesting to notice is the way in which Divine Providence directs the course of history. From the human point of view, the age-long wars of Assyria, Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome would seem to have no possible connection with the fortunes of the insignificant Jewish people. Yet the movements of these world powers all contributed to one end, the preservation, purification, and development of that race to which was committed the Divine Revelation.

The conquests of Alexander the Great brought the Jews into touch with Greek culture, and this influence increased under his successors (1 Macc. i. 1–11). The Greeks found something very congenial in the moral character of the Jews ; the lovers of beauty recognized their kinship with the lovers of truth. Ptolemy Lagi, Alexander's successor in Egypt, annexed Syria and took Jerusalem in 320 B.C. It is said that he particularly favoured the Jews because they were the only

people among his subjects whose word could be trusted. Josephus says: "He knew that the people of Jerusalem were most faithful in the observation of oaths and covenants." For nearly a hundred years Judaea remained under Egyptian rule and it was a period of happiness and prosperity such as she had not enjoyed since the loss of her independence. The Egyptian monarchs encouraged Greek settlements; several were planted in Palestine and many of the new cities were given Greek names. During the Exile the Jews had learnt to preserve their religion and nationality among the Gentiles; now Greeks and Macedonians lived amongst them as neighbours, and they themselves founded colonies in Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor.

A gardener, growing a precious bulb for bloom, will keep it at first in the dark, then gradually bring it to the light, and as flowering-time draws near will give it all the sun and air possible. Juda's flowering-time was fast approaching. The Jews must mingle with the nations for whom they held the truth in trust.

Ptolemy Philadelphus (285–247 B.C.), the very broad-minded and cultured ruler of Egypt, took a great interest in the history and literature of his Jewish subjects. It was in his reign (and tradition says at his request) that the Greek

translation of the Old Testament was begun at Alexandria. This Greek version of the Scriptures was of great importance in preparing the way for Christianity. On the one hand, the Jews of the "Dispersion" (the Jewish colonists) used this translation in their synagogues and thus became familiar with the wonderful language in which the New Testament would presently be written; and on the other hand the Gentiles could now read the Hebrew Scriptures and learn the fundamental truths of religion. It has been said that the Greek language "formed a link between the faith of Israel and the philosophy of Greece."

Judaea was now governed by the high priest at Jerusalem. The office had become hereditary and carried with it the headship of the Jewish community. The fiftieth chapter of Ecclesiasticus (1–23) gives us a beautiful picture of an ideal high priest. Jesus ben Sirach here describes Simon the First, who succeeded his father, Onias the First, in the reign of Ptolemy Lagi. This Simon was surnamed "the Just." He repaired the temple and strengthened the fortifications of Jerusalem. "He took care of his nation, and delivered it from destruction," says Ben Sirach, and then becomes lyrical: "He shone in his days as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full . . . and as the rainbow giving

light in the bright clouds, and as the flower of roses in the days of spring, and as the lilies that are on the brink of the water . . . as a bright fire and frankincense burning in the fire. As a massy vessel of gold adorned with every precious stone." The poet exhausts his lovely Eastern imagery to depict this beautiful character, and then follow a few exquisitely simple words which have remained for all time the perfect picture of the ideal priest: "When he went up to the holy altar, he honoured the vesture of holiness."

But, alas, all the high priests did not live up to this standard. In the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes, Onias II nearly brought grave trouble on his country. He is described as "one of little soul and a great lover of money," and in his foolishness he tried to prevent the payment of the annual tribute to the king of Egypt. His nephew Joseph prevented this rash step, and Ptolemy III made Joseph farmer of the king's taxes, which office he held for about twenty years, during which time Judaea prospered. It seems to have been during this period, however, that a party took its rise in Jerusalem which plotted to overthrow the Egyptian rule in favour of that of Antiochus III of Syria. It would have been well for Juda had those malcontents digested the fable of King Log and King Stork.

The founder of the dynasty which now ruled Syria was Seleucus, who became satrap of Babylonia after the death of Alexander. The seat of Government was soon moved to Antioch in Syria, and a little later Seleucus became master of almost all Alexander's empire, with the exception of Egypt which was held by the Ptolemies. Judaea was at first under Seleucus, before the Egyptian conquest, and he treated the Jews with special favour. He persuaded many of them to settle in his new capital of Antioch, "and gave them many privileges," says Josephus, "equal to those of the Macedonians and the Greeks." After Judaea was annexed by Egypt there was probably always a party who secretly favoured an alliance with the Seleucid kings.

In 219. B.C. war broke out between Antiochus III of Syria and Ptolemy IV of Egypt. Jerusalem suffered severely and the temple was desecrated by the Egyptian king. In 205 Ptolemy IV died suddenly and was succeeded by his son, a child of five years. This gave Antiochus his chance. He marched into Judaea and was welcomed, apparently, by a considerable number of the Jews, and took Jerusalem with little difficulty. From this time, until the Maccabean War, Judaea remained a province of Syria. Egypt tried to regain her hold, but was defeated. Thus Antiochus

at last secured what he and his predecessors had so long desired : Palestine was now a part of the kingdom of the Seleucidae.

Antiochus showed great favour to the Jews, but he was soon engaged in a life and death struggle with the new world power which was then beginning to make itself felt, Rome. The Syrian army made an expedition into Asia Minor where it was defeated by Scipio Africanus in 190, and Antiochus died three years later. His successor was Seleucus Philopator, and the Second Book of Maccabees opens in the last year of this reign. Chapter iii. gives us a vivid account of a dramatic incident which occurred at this time. The high priest was then Onias III, a saintly man who was much loved and reverenced. Under him " the holy city was inhabited with all peace," and Seleucus himself was favourable towards him. But a certain unscrupulous official, one Simon, commander of the temple guard, quarrelled with Onias because the latter would not support some unjust scheme. In order to be revenged upon the high priest, Simon gave secret information to the king's viceroy Apollonius concerning large sums of money deposited in the temple treasury. This, said Simon, could be easily claimed by the king. Like most monarchs of a warring people, Seleucus Philopator needed

money, and Heliodorus was sent to plunder the temple. Onias received the robber courteously, never suspecting his intention; and when this was brazenly stated the high priest firmly refused to surrender the treasure, which, he explained, was in part charitable donations for "the widows and the fatherless" and in part a deposit sent there for safe custody. He told the envoy that "to deceive them who had trusted to the place and temple which is honoured throughout the whole world, for the reverence and holiness of it, was a thing which could not by any means be done." Heliodorus, however, insisted that he was acting on the king's orders, and meant to have the money. He and his guard marched to the treasury and the whole city was horror-stricken. "The priests prostrated themselves before the altar in their priests' vestments, and called upon Him in heaven who made the law concerning things given to be kept, that He would preserve them safe, for them that had deposited them. Now whosoever saw the countenance of the high priest was wounded in heart . . . for the man was so compassed in sadness . . . that it was manifest to them that beheld him what sorrow he had in his heart. Others came flocking together out of their houses, praying and making public supplication, because the place was like to come into contempt."

The manner in which God sent help was very striking in view of the influences then at work in men's minds. The devout Jews stood for the value and beauty of the spiritual world, and the Greeks with whom they had now come in contact stood for the value and beauty of the physical world, and these two aspects of human life, these two divergent aims, clashed then as they clash to-day. It has been said that the Greeks were "the bearers of civilization indeed, but also bearers of moral degeneration." The end of existence to them was physical happiness. Now if there is one thing more than another which is an example of perfect physical beauty and the joy of life, it is "a fine man on a fine horse," as Mr. Chesterton observes, and when Alexander in the pride of his youthful prowess rode his magnificent Buchephalus into Asia he was a fitting symbol of the Greek ideals which followed in his train.

We may grant that it was necessary that the Jews should benefit by this civilization; but some of them were dazzled by the idea of making the most of human life as an end in itself, and it was this party which had helped to bring Jerusalem under the power of the Seleucid kings. Now men saw where this path led. Faith and honour were required to give way before it.

" Worldly prosperity at all costs " was its motto. On one side stood physical force, on the other the power of prayer. Armed men were about to raid the treasury, while priests prayed and women wept, when on a sudden " there appeared a horse with a terrible rider upon him, adorned with a very rich covering, and he ran fiercely and struck Heliodorus. . . Moreover, there appeared two other young men beautiful and strong, bright and glorious, and in comely apparel, who stood by him, on either side, and scourged him without ceasing with many stripes. And Heliodorus suddenly fell to the ground and . . . was carried out, no one being able to help him, the manifest power of God being known." The faithful people were thus given a startling proof of the transcendent reality and beauty of the spiritual world in which they had put their trust.

XVIII

MACCABEES TO HEROD THE GREAT

THE two books of the Maccabees do not follow one another in chronological order. They were written at different times, the first book in Hebrew and the second in Greek. First Maccabees is an historical account of the wars of the three sons of Mathathias, and covers the years 176–133 B.C. Second Maccabees describes Judas' wars only, it begins at an earlier date (177–162) and is an epitome of five books (now lost) written by one Jason (2 Macc. ii. 23–33).

Antiochus IV Epiphanes was determined to suppress Judaism. He knew that there was a strong party in Jerusalem which favoured Greek culture or Hellenism, and he probably thought that the whole nation would surrender the faith of their fathers without much ado, for the high priests themselves had sometimes seemed to set little store by it. In 168 B.C. Apollonius was sent with an army of 20,000 men to besiege Jerusalem, and the city was taken on the Sabbath Day when the Jews would not fight (2 Macc. v. 24–26).

Antiochus commanded that in future the Sabbath should not be kept, nor sacrifice offered nor circumcision practised. All copies of the Law which could be found were destroyed. The temple was desecrated and an altar to Jupiter Olympius was erected upon the altar of Burnt-offering. The Jews were compelled on pain of death to take part in pagan ceremonies and to eat swine's flesh. But the result of all this was quite other than what the king expected. Though some Jews outwardly submitted to the royal decrees, many answered the call to martyrdom with a magnificent heroism hitherto unprecedented in the history of the world. Examples of their terrible sufferings and marvellous constancy are given in 2 Macc. vi. and vii.

But things could not go on like this for ever. In the little hill town of Modin, westward of Jerusalem, there lived a priest of good family with his five splendid sons. The condition of their country was a bitter grief to them, and matters reached a climax when some Syrian officers came to the village with intent to compel the people to sacrifice to pagan gods. Mathathias as a leading citizen, was ordered to set the example, instead of which he slew one of his neighbours who was about to offer the heathen sacrifice, and struck down the Syrian officer also and destroyed

the pagan altar. Then he raised his war-cry: "Every one that hath zeal for the law, and maintaineth the testament, let him follow me." He and his sons took to the hills, where they were joined by many stout followers. This company of bold outlaws traversed the country and threw down the pagan altars and enforced the circumcision of Jewish children. In 166 Mathathias died and left the leadership to his son Judas (1 Macc. ii.).

Judas was a born soldier, "in his acts like a lion," and the war took a different turn from the moment that he assumed command. He was surnamed Maccabaeus, meaning, it is thought, "a hammer," as Edward I was called "the hammer of the Scots." Judas Maccabaeus organized and trained his army and began a systematic campaign (1 Macc. iii–iv. 61). He defeated the Syrian army with heavy loss in several battles, at the last of which Lysias, the regent of Syria, was in command. Lysias retreated to Antioch and Judas made the most of the breathing-space thus offered. On the 25th Chisleu (December) 165 B.C., just three years after its profanation, Judas reconsecrated the temple and restored the daily sacrifice (1 Macc. iv. 36 foll.). The Jewish Feast of the Dedication was kept in memory of this event (cf. St. John x. 22).

For the next eighteen months Judas was practically master of Judaea. He went to the aid of the hard-pressed garrisons in Gilead and Galilee, and conducted successful campaigns against the surrounding heathen nations (1 Macc. v). Antiochus IV was in Persia when he heard the tidings of Judas' successes, and he was so upset that he died of chagrin. The regent Lysias put his son on the throne, as Antiochus V Eupator (1 Macc. vi. 1–17).

Meanwhile Judas felt himself strong enough to attack the garrison of Syrian soldiers in the castle at Jerusalem, that national bugbear. He laid siege to the fortress, but an immense Syrian army was sent against him, consisting of 100,000 foot soldiers, 20,000 cavalry and 32 elephants " trained to battle." " And they showed the elephants the blood of grapes and mulberries to provoke them to fight. And they distributed the beasts by the legions ; and there stood by every elephant a thousand men in coats of mail, and with helmets of brass on their heads ; and five hundred horsemen set in order were chosen for every beast." What wonder that such an array was too strong for Judas' army (vi. 47).

Lysias then laid siege to the temple at Jerusalem which was held by a Jewish garrison, but private affairs demanding his attention elsewhere, he made peace with them, granting the Jews full

religious liberties (1 Macc. vi. 17–63). This treaty brought the *religious* war, as such, to a close; but warfare did not wholly cease for many years; the unsettled state of the country and the various policies and parties of the times continually gave rise to new disagreements and further skirmishes.

The Maccabean party was much displeased by the appointment of Alcimus as high priest; he was one of that faction which favoured Greek customs, whereas the Maccabeans stood for the preservation of Judaism in every detail. There was now a new ruler of Syria, Demetrius I, who had usurped the throne in 162, putting to death Antiochus V and his chief supporter Lysias. Alcimus asked help of Demetrius, who sent an army under Nicanor to his assistance. Judas defeated Nicanor, but within a month another Syrian host marched into Judaea. The Jews were dismayed at the strength of their foes and many forsook Judas, so that his army dwindled down to less than a thousand men. This little force stood its ground until Judas himself was slain. Then it broke and fled in panic. Jonathan and Simon carried off the body of their noble brother and he was buried in the family tomb at Modin amidst the lamentations of his people (1 Macc. vii. and ix. 1–21).

Judas Maccabaeus is acknowledged to be Israel's greatest warrior. His was a stupendous task. He had to revive the martial spirit of a people who had known little or nothing of warfare for four hundred years. He is the last of the great Old Testament heroes and a worthy member of that noble company, with his fiery enthusiasm, his religious fervour, and his immense courage. A remarkable instance of Judas' statesmanlike qualities is recorded in 1 Macc. viii. He recognized the coming world power and sought, by sending ambassadors, a formal alliance with the Romans. Rome entered willingly into alliance with this independent, sturdy race, but the treaty came to nothing effective because Demetrius of Syria had already got a strangle-hold on Judaea.

Meanwhile Demetrius found himself insecure on his usurped throne; a low-born pretender, Alexander Balas, put in a claim for it, calling himself the son of Antiochus IV. Each side courted the friendship of Jonathan who had established himself at Michmash as governor of the Jewish nation (1 Macc. ix. 23–73). Alexander made him "high-priest of the nation" and named him "the king's friend" (1 Macc. x. 20). Further honours came to him when Demetrius was slain in 150, and he retained his position even when Alexander

was defeated and killed. The new king of Syria, Demetrius II, supported him, and he might have lived as an independent ruler for the rest of his life had he not let himself get involved in political troubles, which led to his assassination (1 Macc. x–xiii. 1–54).

By this time the Jews looked to the Hasmonean family as their natural leaders (the descendants of Mathathias were called thus after an ancestor, Hasmon). Simon became high priest on the death of his brother Jonathan, and " governor and leader of the Jews " (1 Macc. xii. 42). He was a singularly successful ruler, and his crowning triumph was the capture of the castle at Jerusalem, that long-standing menace to the liberty of the people. Judaea now enjoyed real independence and the people expressed their gratitude to Simon by a formal decree confirming him in his office and making the high priesthood hereditary in the Hasmonean house " till there should arise a faithful prophet." His rule brought peace and plenty to the land, but he was chiefly honoured for his devotion to the Law and the temple (1 Macc. xiv. 14, 15). His end was tragic, he was murdered by his brutal son-in-law Ptolemy, together with two of his sons. A third son, John Hyrcanus, succeeded him as high priest and ruler of Judaea (1 Macc. xiii. xiv. xv. xvi.).

Hyrcanus was a powerful ruler, but a capable secular prince rather than a good high priest. His family had always been associated with the party of the Pharisees, who stood for careful observance of the Law, but now he went over to the side of the Sadducees, whose interests were political rather than religious. When Hyrcanus died the Jewish commonwealth was so prosperous that it almost equalled the grandeur of the monarchy under Solomon. Hyrcanus left three sons : Aristobulus, Antigonus and Alexander Jannaeus. Aristobulus was the first to assume the title and state of king, which his successors afterwards adopted. The third son, Alexander, " one of the most contemptible figures in Jewish history," had a disastrous reign. On his death his sons Hyrcanus and Aristobulus fought for the kingdom until the Romans, who were now the dominant power, intervened. The Jews holding Jerusalem resisted, and the city was besieged. The final assault took place on the Sabbath and resulted in a terrible massacre of priests and people. Large number of Jews were carried captive to Rome, the Jewish monarchy was abolished and Judaea was made tributary to Rome, though allowed to retain one of the Hasmonean princes as high priest. Hyrcanus, though the nominal ruler, was completely under the sway

of Antipater, an Idumean, who, for his own purposes, curried favour with Rome. Antipater was presently murdered; but by that time his family was in power, his eldest son Phasael being governor of Jerusalem, and his second son, Herod, governor of Galilee. The latter was a very talented but a very unscrupulous man. The mass of the people hated these Idumeans; Edomites were held in contempt by the Jews, and it was galling to them to see any of that race in authority over them. Therefore when Antigonus, a descendant of the old Hasmonean family, aspired to the throne of Judaea, the people rallied round him and he captured both Hyrcanus and Phasael. Herod escaped to Rome, where the senate declared him to be "king of the Jews" (40 B.C.). But Antigonus had held the throne for six years before Herod was able to obtain it. In the spring of 37 he laid siege to Jerusalem and once again the city was taken on a Sabbath day. The temple was stormed and its defenders slain. Antigonus was captured, and as he grovelled at the feet of the Roman procurator Sosius the latter scornfully addressed him as "Antigone," dubbing him a woman while spurning him as a slave. It was an ignominious end for a family such as the Hasmoneans, who had been in power for 126 years.

In order to strengthen his position Herod

married Mariamne, the granddaughter of both Hyrcanus and Aristobulus. He tried to win the favour of the Pharisees by paying great respect to national customs and by building a magnificent temple at Jerusalem. To please the Sadducees or Hellenizing party, he built a theatre, an amphitheatre and a hippodrome at Jerusalem, and to curry favour with the Romans he dedicated temples and rebuilt towns in honour of the emperor. Despite all his efforts he was deeply hated, and presently a terrible jealousy poisoned his life. He murdered all the remaining descendants of the Hasmoneans, including his brother-in-law, his wife, his mother-in-law and Mariamne's two sons. Finally, his eldest son Antipater was executed by his orders a few days before his own death (B.C. 4).

It was towards the close of this dark reign that the Light of the World was born, and one of Herod's last acts of fury, the Massacre of the Innocents, gave the Church her first martyrs. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men: and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

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